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BY GUSTAVE AIMARD

AUTHOR OF
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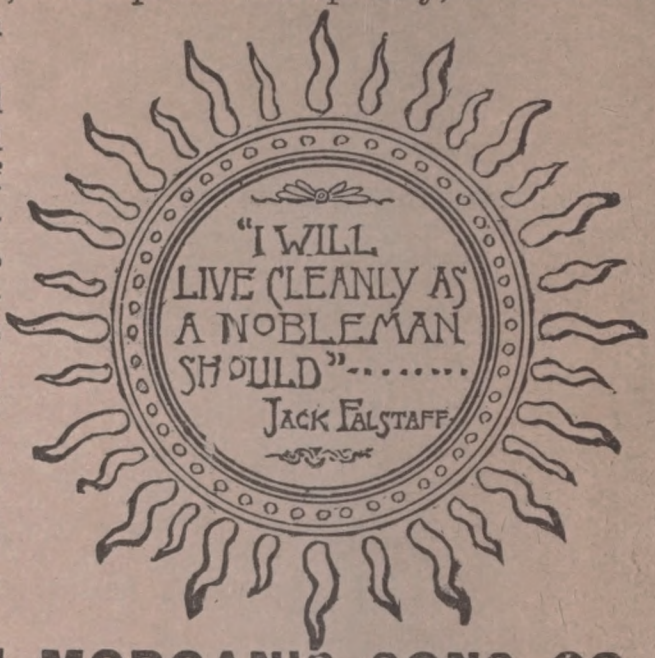

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AUTHOR OF "THE GUIDE OF THE DESERT," "FLYING HORSEMAN," ETC., ETC.

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THE INSURGENT CHIEF

CHAPTER I.

THE CALLEJON DE LAS CRUCES.

The town of San Miguel de Tucuman has a certain middle-aged odour about it which is profusely exhaled from the old cloisters of its convents, and from the thick and gloomy walls of its churches. The Callejon de las Cruces, a narrow street, lined with low and sombre houses, is naturally enough the most picturesque in the town.

At the period of our history, and perhaps at the present time, the greater part of the right side of the Callejon de las Cruces was occupied by a high and large house, of a cold and sombre aspect, whose thick walls, and the iron bars with which its windows were furnished, made it resemble a prison.

Every sound died without an echo on the threshold of the door of this gloomy house.

One evening—the very night when the governor of San Miguel had given, at the cabildo, a ball to celebrate the victory gained by Zeno Cabral over the Spaniards*—towards midnight, a troop of armed men, whose measured tread sounded heavily in the darkness, left the street de las Mercaderes, and, having reached the massive and solidly-bolted door of the house of which we have spoken, they stopped.

He who appeared to be the chief of these men had knocked three times with the pommel of his sword, and, in a low voice, exchanged a few words with an invisible person; then, on a sign from himself, the ranks of his troop opened, and four women—four spectres, perhaps—draped in long veils, which did not allow any part of their person to be perceived, entered the house silently, and in a line.

This singular circumstance had transpired without awakening in any way the attention of the poor people in the vicinity. The greater part were present at the *fete* in the streets or in the squares of the high quarters of the town; the remainder were sleeping, or too indifferent to trouble themselves about any noise whatever.

So that, on the morrow, the inhabitants of the Callejon de las Cruces would have been quite unable to give the slightest account of what had passed at midnight in

* See "The Guide of the Desert," same publishers

their street, at the gate of the Black House, as among themselves they called this gloomy habitation, for which they had a strong dislike.

Several days had passed since the fete, the town had resumed its calm and peaceful appearance, only the troops had not raised their camp—on the contrary, the *Montonera* of Don Zeno Cabral had installed itself at a short distance from them.

Vague rumours, which circulated in the town, gave rise to the belief that the revolutionists were preparing a great expedition against the Spaniards.

Emile Gagnepain, despite of his dislike to politics, had to resign himself to his fate as secretary to the Duke de Mantone; but he found his position a magnificent sinecure; the duke and his secretary scarcely met once a week.

M. Dubois, completely absorbed in politics, often passed the day in long and serious conferences with the chiefs of the executive power. He had been charged with very difficult work.

So that, spite of the lively interest which he had in his young countryman, the diplomatist was obliged to neglect him—of which the latter by no means complained; on the contrary, profiting conscientiously by the agreeable leisure, he gave himself up with delight to the contemplative life so dear to artists, and lounged whole days about the town and country, in quest of picturesque points of view, and of fine landscapes.

This search was by no means unprofitable in a country such as that in which he was living, where nature, yet little spoiled by the unintelligent hand of man, possessed that seal of majesty and of grandeur which God alone knows how to impress alike upon the most vast and the meanest works which spring from His all-powerful hands.

The inhabitants, accustomed to see the young man, attracted by his handsome and frank countenance, by his gentle manners and careless air, were, by degrees, familiarised with him; and, notwithstanding that he was a European, and especially a Frenchman—that is to say, a *gringo* or herectic—had at last come to be very friendly to him, and allowed him to go wherever fancy led him.

Every one envied him, and felt constrained to love him, by reason even of his placid indifference. He alone, perhaps, did not perceive the effect produced by his presence, when he rambled about the square or the most populous streets of the town; and he continued his promenade without even considering that he was a walking enigma, of which they vainly sought the key. Some even, quite astounded by this wondrous indifference, which they could not comprehend, went so far as to believe that if he were not quite mad, at least he had some tendencies that way.

Emile occupied himself neither with one nor the other. He continued his careless open-air life, following with his eyes the birds in their flight, listening for hours together to the mysterious murmur of a cascade, or with rapture watching a splendid sunset in the Cordillera.

The young painter, as we have already said, lived in a house placed at the disposal of M. Dubois by the Buenos Ayrean government, and situated on the Plaza Mayor. The young man, on stepping out of his house, found himself in face of a wide street, furnished with shops. This street was the Calle de las Mercaderes. Now, the painter had been in the habit of going straight on, of following the Calle Mercaderes, at the end of which was the Callejon de las Cruces; he then entered the callejon, and arrived, without any turning, at the river. Thus, twice a day—in the morning in going out, and in the evening in returning from his promenade—Emile Gagnepain passed the entire length of the Callejon de las Cruces.

He stopped sometimes for a considerable time to admire the graceful outline of some gable-ends, dating from the earlier years of the conquest, and preferred to traverse this silent and solitary street, where he could freely give himself up to his thoughts without fear of being interrupted.

One morning when Emile Gagnepain had begun his walk, and was pensively traversing the Callejon de las Cruces, at the moment when he was passing the house of which we have spoken, he felt a slight tap on the crown of his hat, as if some light object had struck it, and a flower fell at his feet.

The young man stopped with astonishment. His first movement was to raise his head, but he saw nothing.

"Hum!" he murmured; "what does this mean? This flower, at all events, has not fallen from the sky."

He stooped and picked it up.

It was a white rose, scarcely half opened, and still fresh and damp with dew.

"Well, that is odd," said Emile; "this flower has only been gathered a few minutes! is it not to me that it has been thrown? Nay," added he, looking around him, "it would be very difficult to have thrown it to another, for I am alone. I must not be carried away by vanity. I'll wait till the evening."

But he was young, he believed himself good-looking; and, moreover, he had more than a reasonable share of vanity. His imagination soon carried him away. He called to mind all the love-stories he had heard related in relation to Spain; and, putting this and that together, he soon arrived at this conclusion, excessively flattering to his self-love—that a beautiful senora, held prisoner by some jealous husband, had seen him pass under her windows, had felt herself drawn towards him by an irresistible passion, and had thrown him this flower to attract his attention.

During the whole day the young man was burning with anxiety; twenty times he thought of returning, but, happily, reflection came to his aid, and he came to the conclusion that it would be better not again to pass the house till the hour when he was in the habit of returning home.

"In this way," said he, with a knowing air, "if she expects me, she will throw me another flower; then I will buy a guitar, a mantle the colour of the wall, and I will come like a lover of the time of the Cid Campeador."

But, notwithstanding this mockery, which be addressed to himself as he wandered about, he was much more concerned in the matter than he was ready to confess, and every moment he was consulting his watch to see if the hour for his return was near.

When the painter thought the hour had arrived, he turned back towards home. Affecting, perhaps, a little too visibly the manners of a man completely indifferent, he reached the Callejon de las Cruces, and soon arrived near the house.

Spite of himself, the young man was flushed; his heart beat rapidly, and he felt a buzzing in his ears.

All of a sudden, he felt a pretty smart shock to his hat, and briskly raised his head.

Sudden as had been his movement, he could see nothing, except a small object, enveloped in paper, and tied carefully with a purple silk thread several times round the paper.

"Oh, oh!" thought the painter, picking up the little roll of paper, and rapidly hiding it in the pocket of his waistcoat; "this complicates the matter. Are we already to write to one another? The devil! this is making rapid progress!"

He began to walk rapidly to reach his lodgings; but soon reflecting that this unaccustomed proceeding would astonish people who were in the habit of seeing him lounging and looking about him, checked himself.

But his hand was incessantly going to his pocket.

"God pardon me," said he, after a time! "I believe it is a ring. Oh, oh! that would be charming! Upon my word, I will return to my first idea—I will buy a guitar, and a mantle the colour of the wall, and in making love to my beautiful unknown—for she is beautiful, I doubt not—I will forget the torments of exile."

As the reader has been in a position to perceive, Emile Gagnepain loved talking to himself, but the fault was not his. Thrown by chance in a foreign land, only speaking with difficulty the language of the people among whom he found himself, and not having near him any friend to whom he could confide his joys and his troubles, he was to some exte it obliged to make a confidant of himself.

While he was still reflecting, the young man arrived at the house which he occupied in common with M. Dubois.

An attendant seemed to be waiting for his arrival.

"I beg your pardon, your lordship," said the man, "my lord duke has several times asked for you to-day. He has left orders that as soon as you arrive we should ask you to go to his apartment."

"Very well," he answered, "I will go there immediately."

"Is it not strange," murmured he, mounting the staircase, "that this nuisance of a man, of whom I never know how to speak, should just want me at the very moment when I desire to be alone?"

M. Dubois waited for him, in a large, richly-furnished room, pacing up and down, his head lowered and his arms crossed behind his back, like a man occupied with serious reflections.

As soon as he perceived the young man, he advanced rapidly towards him.

"Oh, you have come!" he cried. "I have been waiting for you two hours. What has become of you?"

"I have been walking. Life is so short!"

"Always the same!" pursued the duke, laughing.

"I shall take good care not to change; I am happy as I am. But, pardon me, could you not put off this grave conversation to a later period?"

"Impossible!" pursued M. Dubois, laughing; "you must take your part in it."

"Then, since it must be so," said he, with a sigh, "what is the question?"

"The facts are in a few words. You know that affairs are becoming more and more serious, and that the Spaniards have resumed a vigorous offensive, and have gained some important successes?"

"I! I know nothing at all, I assure you."

"But how do you pass your time, then?"

"I have told you—I walk; I admire the works of God, and I am happy."

"You are a philosopher."

"I do not know."

"In a word, here is the matter in question. The government, frightened, with reason, at the progress of the Spaniards, wish to put an end to it by uniting against them all the forces of which they can dispose."

"Very sensibly reasoned; but what can I do?"

"You shall see."

"I ask nothing better."

"The government wishes, then, to concentrate all its forces to strike a great blow. Emissaries have already been dispatched in all directions to inform the generals; but while we attack the enemy in front, it is important, in order to assure their defeat, to place them between two fires."

"That is to reason strategically, like Napoleon."

"Now, one general only is in a position to operate on the rear of the enemy, and to cut off his retreat. This general is San Martin, who is now in Chili, at the head of an army of 10,000 men. Unhappily, it is excessively difficult to traverse the Spanish lines; but I have suggested an infallible means of doing so."

"You are full of schemes."

"This means consists in dispatching you to San Martin. You are a foreigner; they will not distrust you; you will pass in safety."

"Well, my dear sir, your project is charming."

"Is it not?"

"Yes, but on thorough reflection it does not please me at all, and I absolutely refuse it. The devil! I do not care to be hanged as a spy."

"What you say to me annoys me to the last degree, for I interest myself very much in you."

"I thank you for it, but I prefer that you should leave me in my obscurity."

"I know it. Unhappily it is absolutely necessary that you charge yourself with this mission."

"Oh, indeed! It will be difficult to convince me."

"You are in error, my young friend; on the contrary, it will be very easy to me."

"I do not believe it."

"In this way: it appears that two Spanish prisoners, arrested some days ago at the cabildo, and whose trial is proceeding at this moment, have accused you of being one of their accomplices."

"I!" cried the young man, starting with rage.

"You!" coolly answered the diplomatist. "The order for your arrest was already signed when, not wishing you to be shot, I intervened."

"I thank you for it."

"You know how much I love you. I warmly took up your defence, and found no other expedient to make your innocence apparent to all, than to propose you as an emissary to General San Martin."

"But it is a horrible murder!" cried the young man, with despair; "I am in a fix!"

"Alas, yes; you see me afflicted at it—hanged by the Spaniards, if they take you—but they will not take you—or shot by the Buenos Ayreans, if you refuse."

"It is frightful," said the young man; "never did an honest man find himself in such an alternative."

"Which do you make up your mind to?"

"I accept," said he, cursing to himself.

"Calm yourself. The danger is not so great as you suppose. Your mission will terminate well."

"When I dreamed that I had come to America to study art, and to escape politics, what a fine idea I had then!"

"Grumble now," M. Dubois said, laughing; "later you will relate your adventures."

"It is necessary that I set out immediately, no doubt?"

"No, we are not going on so rapidly as that. Your journey will be long and difficult."

"How much time can I have to get ready to leave?"

"Eight days. Will that suffice you?"

"Amply. Once more I thank you."

The countenance of the young man suddenly brightened, and he added—

"And during this time I shall be free?"

"Absolutely."

"Well," pursued he, grasping heartily the hand of M. Dubois, "I begin to be of your opinion."

"In what way?" said the diplomatist, surprised at the sudden change manifested by the young man.

"I believe that all will finish better than I at first thought."

And after having ceremoniously saluted the old man, he left the saloon and went to his apartments.

CHAPTER II.

THE LETTER.

The painter had taken refuge in his apartments, a prey to extreme agitation.

Having reached his bed-room, he doubly locked the door; then, certain that for a time no one would come to thrust him out of this last asylum, he allowed himself to fall heavily on a butacca, threw his body backward, leaned his head forward, crossed his arms over his chest, and—an extraordinary thing for an organisation like his—he gave himself up to sad and profound reflections.

At the end of half-an-hour, the artist arrived at this miserable conclusion—that, from the first moment that he had placed his foot on the New World, Fate had taken a malicious pleasure in falling furiously upon him, and in making him the sport of the most disastrous combinations, spite of the efforts that he had made to remain constantly free from politics, and to live as a true artist.

"*Pardieu!*" he cried, angrily striking with his hand the arm of his chair, "it must be confessed that I have no chance! In conditions like these, life becomes literally impossible. What is to be done? I have eight days before me. Well, I must make up my mind what to do. But what? I see nothing but flight! Hum! flight—that's not easy; I shall be closely watched. Unhappily, I have no choice; come, let me study a plan of escape. Away with the wretched fate which obstinately makes of my life a melodrama, when I employ all my powers to make it a vaudeville!"

Upon this the young man, whose gaiety of disposition gained the victory over the anxiety which agitated him, set himself—half laughing, half seriously—to reflect anew.

He remained thus for more than an hour, without stirring from his butacca.

It cannot be denied that at the end of that time he was as far advanced as before.

"Well, I give it up for the present," he cried, rising suddenly; "my imagination absolutely refuses me its aid! It is always so"

Then he began to stride about his room, to stretch his legs, mechanically rolled up a cigarette, and felt in his pocket for his mechero to light it.

In the movement which he made in searching for it, he felt in his waistcoat-pocket something which he did not remember to have placed there.

"*Pardieu!*" said he, striking his forehead, "I had completely forgotten my mysterious unknown. If this lasts eight days, I am convinced I shall completely go out of my mind. Let me see what it is that she has so adroitly dropped on my hat."

While he soliloquised, the painter had drawn from his pocket the little roll of paper.

"It is extraordinary," continued he, "the influence which women exert, perhaps unknown to ourselves, on the organisation of men."

He remained some moments turning the paper in his hand, without coming to the resolution to break the silk, which alone prevented him from satisfying his curiosity.

At last, with a sudden resolution, he put an end to his hesitation, and broke with his teeth the delicate silk thread, and then unrolled the paper carefully. This paper, which served for an envelope, contained another, folded carefully, and covered on every page with fine writing.

Spite of himself, the young man felt a nervous trembling as he unfolded this paper, in which a ring was enclosed.

The ring was a simple gold ring, in which was set a ruby of great value.

"What does this mean?" murmured the young man, admiring the ring, and trying it mechanically on all his fingers.

But although the artist had a very beautiful hand, this ring was so small, that it was only on the little finger that he could succeed in putting it.

"This person is evidently deceived," pursued the painter; "I cannot keep this ring; I will return it, come what may. But to do that I must know the individual, and I have no other means of obtaining this information except by reading her letter."

But before opening the paper, which he apparently held with such a careless hand, and on which he looked so disdainfully—so much, say what we may, is man always a comedian, even to himself, when no one can see him, because even then he tries to impose upon his self-love—the artist went to try the lock, to see if the door was firmly fastened, and that no one could surprise him; then he slowly returned, sat himself on the butacca, and unfolded the paper.

It was, indeed, a letter, written in a fine close hand, but nervous and agitated, which convinced him in a moment that it was a woman's writing.

The young man at first read it cursorily. As he proceeded he found his interest increase; and when he had reached the last word, he remained with his eyes fixed on the thin paper which was being crushed in his convulsive fingers.

The following are the contents of this letter:—

"As an important preliminary, let me, senor, claim from your courtesy a formal promise—a promise in which you will not fail, I am convinced, if, as I have the presentiment, you are a true caballero. I demand that you read this letter without interruption from beginning to end, before passing any judgment whatever.

"You are, senor—if, as I believe, I am not deceived in my observation—a Frenchman from Europe: that is to say, the son of a country where gallantry and devotion to women reign supreme.

"I also am—not a Frenchwoman, but born in Europe; that is to say, although unknown to you, your friend, almost your sister on that far-off land; and as such, I have a right to your protection, and I now boldly claim it from your honour.

"My husband, the Marquis de Castelmelhor, commands a division of the Brazilian army, which, they say, has some days since entered Buenos Ayres.

"Coming from Peru with my daughter and some servants, with the intention of joining my husband in Brazil, I have been surprised, carried away, and declared a prisoner of war, by a Buenos Ayrean Montenero.

"If it were but a question of a detention more or less protracted, I would resign myself; but, unhappily, a terrible fate threatens me—a frightful danger hangs not only over my own head, but over that of my daughter—my innocent and pure Eva.

"An implacable enemy has sworn our ruin; he has boldly accused us of being spies, and in a few days we shall be brought before a tribunal assembled to judge us, and the verdict of which cannot be doubtful—the death of traitors, dishonour! The Marchioness of Castelmelhor cannot submit to such infamy.

"Heaven has inspired me with the thought of addressing you, senor, for you alone can save me.

"Will you do it? I believe you will.

"A stranger in this country—sharing neither the prejudices, the narrow ideas, nor the hatred of its inhabitants against Europeans—you ought to make common cause with us, and try to save us.

"I have long hesitated before writing this letter. Although your manners were those of a respectable man—although the frank expression of your countenance, and even your youth, prepossessed me in your favour—I feared to trust myself to you; but when I learned that you were a Frenchman, my fears vanished.

"To-morrow morning, between ten and eleven, present yourself boldly at the door of the Black House, and knock. When the door is opened, say that you have heard that a professor of the piano is wanted in the convent, and that you have come to offer your services.

"But be very careful. Remember that you are the only hope of two innocent women, who, if you refuse them your help, will die cursing you; for their safety depends on you.

"The most unfortunate of women,

"Marquise LEONA DE CASTELMELHOR."

No pen could describe the expression of astonishment, mingled with fright, which was painted on the countenance of the young man, when he had finished the reading of this singular letter.

To say nothing of the check to his self-love—a check always disagreeable to a man who for several hours had given his imagination free play in the pleasant land of chimeras, and who had thought himself the object of a sudden and irresistible passion, caused by his good looks and his Don Juan-like appearance—the service which the unknown lady demanded of him could not but considerably embarrass him.

"Decidedly," he murmured, in a low voice, "Fate too furiously pursues me. This is absurd! Here am I asked to be a protector—I, who so much want protection myself!"

He rose, and began to stride about his room.

"However," added he, after a pause, "these ladies are in a frightful position; I cannot abandon them thus, without trying to come to their aid; my honour is engaged in it. But what is to be done?"

He sat down again, and was lost in a deep reverie. At last he again arose.

Emile had evidently made a resolve.

He opened the door, and went down into the patio.

It was almost night; the attendants, freed from their labours, more or less properly accomplished, were resting themselves, reclining on palm-mats, smoking, laughing, and chatting together.

The painter had not long to search for his domestics in the midst of the twenty or five-and-twenty individuals grouped pell-mell on the ground.

He made a sign to one of them to come to him, and he immediately went up again into his room.

The Indian, at the call of his master, immediately rose, in order to obey him.

He was an Indian guaranis, still very young; he appeared to be at the most twenty-four or twenty-five, with fine, bold, and intelligent features, a tall figure, of a robust appearance; he wore the costume of the gauchos of the pampa, and was named Tyro.

At the call of his master he had thrown away his cigarette, picked up his hat, gathered his poncho round him, and darted towards the staircase.

The painter liked this young man, who, although of a taciturn disposition, appeared, nevertheless, to entertain some affection for him.

"Enter, and close the door behind you," said the painter to him, in a friendly tone: "we have some important things to talk about."

"Then, with your permission, master, I will leave the door open."

"What is that caprice for?"

"It is not a caprice, master; all these places are rendered noiseless by the mats; a spy can come and put his ear to the door and hear all that we may say; whereas, if all the doors remain open, no one can enter without our seeing him, and we shall not risk being watched."

"What you remark is very sensible, my good Tyro; leave the doors open, then. The precaution cannot do any harm, although I do not believe in spies."

"Does not the master believe in the night?" answered the Indian, with an emphatic gesture. "The spy is like the night."

"Let us come to the reason for which I have called you."

"I am listening, master."

"Tyro, first answer me, frankly, the question which I am about to ask you."

"Let the master speak."

"Are you only a good domestic, strictly performing your duties; or a devoted servant, on whom I have the right to reckon at all times?"

"A devoted servant, master—a brother, a son, a friend. You cured my mother of a disease which appeared incurable. As to me, you have treated me as a man, never commanding me with rudeness, and never obliging me to do shameful or dishonourable things, though I am an Indian. You have always considered me an intelligent being. I repeat, master, I am devoted to you in everything and for ever."

"Thank you, Tyro," answered the painter, with slight emotion; "for I have need of your services."

"I am ready; but what is to be done?"

Notwithstanding the candour of this avowal, the French painter by no means ntended to put the Indian completely in the confidence of his secrets.

Too much civilisation renders us mistrustful.

The guaranis readily perceived his hesitation.

"The master has nothing to teach Tyro," said he, with a smile; "the Indian knows all."

"What!" cried the young man, with a start of surprise; "you know all!"

"Yes," he merely said.

"*Pardieu!*" pursued the artist; "for the curiosity of the thing, I would not be sorry if you were to inform me how far extends that 'all.'"

"That is easy; let the master listen."

Then, to the astonishment of the young man, Tyro related to him, without omitting the least detail, all that he had done since his arrival at San Miguel.

However, by degrees Emile, by a great effort, succeeded in regaining his coolness, reflecting with inward satisfaction that this recital, so complete in other respects, had one omission—an important omission for him; it stopped at that very morning.

But fearing that this omission merely arose from forgetfulness, he resolved to assure himself of it.

"Well," said he, "all that you relate is correct, but you forget to speak about my walks through the town."

"Oh, as to that," answered the Indian, with a smile, "it is useless to occupy myself with that. At the end of two days it was found that it was not worth while to follow him."

"The devil! I have been followed then! I did not know I had friends who took such an interest in me. And you, no doubt, know the person who has thus played the spy?"

"I will tell you, when the time arrives to do so; but he is but an instrument; besides, if this person spies you at the command of another, I watch him, master, for your sake. I alone possess your secrets, so you may be easy."

"What! you know my secrets!" cried the painter.

"The white rose and the letter of the Callejon de las Cruces; but I repeat that I alone know it."

"This is too much!" murmured the young man.

"A devoted servant," seriously remarked the Indian, "ought to know all, so that

when the time comes that his assistance may be necessary, he may be in a position to come to his master's aid."

The artist then decided on doing what most men would have decided on doing under similar circumstances. Seeing that there was no means of doing otherwise, he determined on giving his entire confidence to the Indian, and he avowed all with

Happily for him, the painter had to do with an honest and really devoted man.

Tyro had for a long time led the life of the gauchos, hunted the pampa, and explored the desert in all directions. He was thoroughly acquainted with all the Indian schemes. Nothing would have been easier for him than to have acted as a guide to his master, and have conducted him either to Peru, Buenos Ayres, Chili, or even to Brazil.

When confidence was thoroughly established between the two men, though the Frenchman had at first acted with feigned candour, he was not long in displaying all the artless honesty of his character. He at once seriously asked the advice of his servant.

"This is what must be done," said the latter. "This house is filled with spies. Pretend to put yourself in a rage with me, and dismiss me. To-morrow, at the time of your usual walk, I will meet you, and we will settle all. Our conversation has lasted too long already, master. Follow me to the door of the room, speaking in a loud tone, and finding fault with me; then, in a little while, you will come down and dismiss me before everybody. Above all, master," he added, "say nothing till to-morrow to the occupants of the house; do not let them suspect our arrangement."

Having so said, the Indian withdrew, his finger on his lips. All was done as had been arranged between master and servant.

CHAPTER III.

THE RECLUSES.

Almost as half-past ten had sounded from the clock of the Cabildo of San Miguel, a man knocked at the door of the mysterious house.

This individual, dressed somewhat like the well-to-do artisans of the town, was a man of middle height, slightly bent by age; some few grey hairs escaped from under his straw hat, he wore large spectacles with iron frame, and supported himself on a stick.

In a minute or two a little slide moved in a groove, and the head of an old woman appeared behind.

"Who are you? and what do you want here, senor?" said a voice.

"Senora," answered the old man, slightly coughing, "excuse my boldness; but I have heard that a professor of music is required in this establishment. If I am deceived, it only remains for me to withdraw."

While the old man said these few words in the most natural tone, the woman behind the grating examined him with earnestness.

After a short pause—

"Follow me," she said, in a peevish tone, "and replace your hat; these corridors are cold and damp."

The old man bowed, replaced his hat on his head, and, leaning on his stick, he followed the nun with a somewhat trembling step.

The nun led him through long corridors, which appeared to turn back upon themselves, and which at last opened into a rather spacious cloister.

The walls of this cloister, towards which opened the doors of some thirty little chambers, were garnished with a number of pictures of a mediocre character.

The old man merely threw a disdainful look upon these paintings, half effaced by time and weather, and continued to follow the nun, who trotted on before him, causing at every step a jingling of the heavy bunch of keys suspended to her girdle.

At the end of this cloister there was another. Arrived nearly half-way through this one, the nun stopped, and after having fetched her breath for a minute or two, she cautiously gave two slight taps at a black oak door, curiously sculptured.

"Adelante," said a gentle and musical voice.

The nun opened the outer door and disappeared, after having requested the old man to wait. Some minutes passed, and then the inner door opened, and the nun re-appeared.

"Come in," said she, making a sign for him to approach.

"Come, she is not very loquacious, at least," grumbled the old man to himself, as he obeyed.

The nun stood on one side to give him passage, and he entered the little room, whither she followed him.

This little room, with very comfortable furniture in old black carved oak, and the walls of which were covered, in Spanish fashion, with thin Cordova leather, was divided into two, which was indicated by a door placed in a corner.

Three persons were, at the time, in the room, sitting on high-backed carved chairs.

These three persons were women.

The first, still young and very beautiful, wore the complete costume of a nun; the diamond cross, suspended by a large silk ribbon from her neck, and falling on her breast, at once pointed her out as the superior of the house, which, notwithstanding the simple and sombre appearance of its exterior, was, in reality, occupied by Carmelite nuns.

The two other ladies wore ordinary costume; one was the Marchioness de Castelmelhor, the other Dona Eva, her daughter.

"My dear sister," said the abbess, addressing the old woman, in that harmonious voice which had already agreeably struck the ear of the old man, "bring, I beg you, a chair for this gentleman."

The nun obeyed, and the stranger seated himself, with an apology.

"So," continued the abbess, this time addressing herself to the old man, "you are a professor of music?"

"Yes, senora," answered he, bowing.

"Are you of our country?"

"No, senora; I am an Italian professor, and wish to get work."

"That is true," pursued she, with interest. "Well, we will try to procure you some pupils."

"A thousand thanks for so much goodness, senora," he humbly answered.

"You really interest me, and to prove how much I desire to assist you, this young lady will be pleased, for my sake, to take this very day her lesson with you," said she, pointing towards Dona Eva.

"I am at the orders of the young lady, as I am at yours, senora," answered the old man.

"Well, that is agreed," said the abbess; and turning towards the portress, "My dear sister," added she, with a gracious smile, "be so good, I beg you, as to bring in some refreshments."

The portress bowed with a crabbed air, suddenly turned round, and left the room, casting a sour look around her.

There was a silence of two or three minutes, at the expiration of which the abbess gently rose, advanced on tiptoe towards the door and opened it so suddenly that the portress, whose eye was placed at the key-hole, stood confused and blushing.

"Ah! you are still there, my good sister?" said the abbess. "I am glad of it. I had forgotten to beg you to bring me, when you go down to re-conduct this gentleman, my Book of Hours, that I left, through forgetfulness, this morning in the choir in my stall."

The portress bowed, grunting between her teeth some incomprehensible excuses.

The abbess followed her a moment with her eyes—and then returned.

"Respectable old man," she said laughing, "cover up the locks of your fair hair, which are indiscreetly escaping from under your peruke."

"The devil!" cried the professor, quite taken aback, suddenly putting his two hands to his head, and, at the same time, letting his cane and his hat fall.

At this unorthodox exclamation, uttered in good French, the three ladies laughed afresh, while the disconcerted professor looked at them with delight, not understanding anything which had passed, and arguing nothing favorable to him from this railing and unexpected gaiety.

"Hush!" said the abbess, placing a delicate finger on her rosy lips, "some one is coming."

They were silent.

She withdrew the curtain. Almost immediately the door opened.

It was two lay sisters, who brought sweets and refreshments, as the abbess had desired.

They placed the whole on a table and then withdrew with a respectful bow.

The curtain was immediately dropped behind them.

"Do you now believe, my dear marchioness," said the superior, "that I was right in mistrusting our sister, the portress?"

"Oh, yes, madame; this woman, sold to our enemies, is wicked, and I dread the consequences."

A brilliant flash darted from the black eyes of the young woman.

"It is for her to tremble, madame," said she, "now that I have in my hand the proofs of her treason; but do not let us care for that," said she, resuming her cheerful countenance; "time presses, let us take our places at the table; and you, senor, taste our preserves."

The Marchioness, remarking the embarrassed position and the piteous air of the stranger, quickly approached him, and said with a gracious smile—

"It is useless to keep up any further disguise," said she to him; "it is I, senor, who have written to you; speak, then, without fear before madame."

"Madame," answered the painter, breathing heavily, "you remove an immense weight from my breast. I humbly confess that I did not know what countenance to assume in seeing myself recognised so unawares."

"You are an admirable actor, senor," pursued the abbess; "your hair does not at all come out from under your peruke; I only wished to tease you a little. Now, drink, eat, and do not worry yourself about anything."

The collation was then attacked by the four persons, between whom the ice was now broken, and who talked gaily to each other. The abbess especially, young and merry, was charmed at this trick she was playing the revolutionary authorities of Tacuman.

"Now," said she, when the repast was finished, "let us talk seriously."

"Talk seriously, I should like nothing better," pursued the painter; "*apropos*

of that, I shall permit myself to recall the phrase that you have yourself uttered—time presses."

"That is true; you are no doubt astonished to see me, to whom has been confided the care of two prisoners, enter into a plot, the design of which is to permit them to escape."

"Indeed," murmured the painter, bowing; "that does appear rather strange to me."

"I have several motives for it, and your astonishment will cease when you know that I am a Spaniard, and have no sympathy with the revolution."

"That appears to me logical enough."

"Moreover, in my opinion, a convent is not—a prison. Again, women ought to be always placed out of the region of politics, and be left free to act in their own fashion. In fact, to sum up, the Marchioness de Castelmelhor is an old friend of my family; I love her daughter as a sister."

The two ladies threw themselves into the arms of the abbess, loading her with caresses and thanks.

"Good, good," pursued she, gently motioning them aside, "let me continue; I have sworn to save you, and I will save you, come what may, my dear creatures. It would be marvellous, indeed," added she, smiling, "if three women, aided by a Frenchman, could not be clever enough to deceive these yellow men."

"The more I reflect, the more I fear the consequences for you; I tremble, for these men are without pity," murmured the marchioness.

"Poltroon!" gaily cried the superior; "have we not the caballero with us?"

"Yes, ladies, until the last gasp!" he cried.

The truth is, that the beauty of Dona Eva, joined to the romance of the situation, had completely subjugated the artist.

"I knew I was not deceived!" cried the abbess, holding out her hand, which the painter raised to his lips.

"Yes, ladies," pursued he, "God is my witness, that all that is humanly possible to do to assure your flight, I will attempt; but, doubtless you have not addressed yourselves to me without concerting a plan."

"*Mon dieu*, sir!" answered the marchioness, "this plan is very simple."

"I am all attention, madame."

"We have no acquaintance in this town, where, without our knowing why, it appears we have many enemies, without reckoning one single friend."

"That is pretty well my position also," said the young man, shaking his head.

"Yours, sir!" said she, with surprise.

"Yes, yes, mine, madame; but continue, I beg."

"Our good superior can do but one single thing for us—open the gates of the convent."

"Hum," murmured the painter, like an echo.

"You understand how critical would be our position, wandering in a town which is completely unknown to us. Then we thought of you."

"And you have done well, madame," answered the painter, with animation. "I am, perhaps, the only man incapable of betraying you in the whole town."

"Thank you for my mother and myself, sir," gently said the young girl, who had kept silence.

The painter was half dazed; the sweet and plaintive accents of that voice made his heart beat rapidly.

"Unhappily, I am very weak myself, ladies," he resumed; "I am alone, a foreigner, suspected even, threatened with being placed on my trial."

"Oh!" said they, joining their hands in their grief, "we are lost then."

"*Mon dieu!*" cried the abbess, "we have placed all our hope in you."

"Wait," pursued he; "all is perhaps not so desperate as we suppose. As for me, I am preparing a plan of escape; all I can offer you is, to share my flight."

"Oh, willingly!" cried the young girl, clapping her hands with joy.

Then, ashamed at having allowed herself to give way to a thoughtless movement, she lowered her eyes.

"My daughter has answered you for herself and for me, sir," said the marchioness, proudly.

"I thank you for this confidence, of which I shall try to prove myself worthy, madame; only I want a few days to prepare everything."

"That is right, sir; but what do you mean by a few days?"

"Three at the least—four at the most."

"Well, we can wait. Now, can you explain to us what is the plan you have adopted?"

"I do not know it myself, madame. I find myself in a country which is totally unknown to me, and in which I naturally want the commonest experience. I must trust to the direction of my servant."

"Are you quite sure of this man, sir? Pardon me for saying this, but you know one word might ruin us."

"I am as sure of the person in question as a man can be. It is he who has furnished me with the means of appearing before you without awakening suspicion."

"Is he a Spaniard, a foreigner, or a half-caste?"

"He is simply an Indian guaranis, to whom I have been fortunate enough to render some slight service."

"You are right, sir; you can no doubt reckon on this man. The Indians are brave and faithful; when they are devoted, it is to the death. Pardon me all these questions."

"I think it is very natural, madame, that you should desire to be completely informed as to my plans for our common safety. Be thoroughly persuaded that when I shall positively know what must be done, I will hasten to inform you of it."

"Thank you, sir; will you permit me to ask you one question more?"

"Speak, madame. In coming here, I place myself entirely at your orders."

"Are you rich?"

The painter blushed; his eyebrows knitted.

"Oh, you do not understand me, sir," the marchioness eagerly cried; "far from me be the thought of offering you a reward. The service that you consent to render us is one of those that no treasure could pay for."

"Madame——" he murmured.

"Permit me to finish. We are associates now," said she, with a charming smile. "Now, in an association each one ought to take a share of the common expenses. A project like ours must be conducted with skill and celerity; a miserable question of money might mar its success or retard its execution. In that sense, I repeat my words—are you rich?"

"In any other position but that in which fate has temporarily placed me, I should answer you—yes, madame, for I am an artist. But at this moment, in the perilous position in which you and I find ourselves—when it is necessary to undertake a desperate struggle against a whole population—I must be frank with you, and admit that money, the sinews of war, almost wholly fails me."

"So much the better!" cried the marchioness, with a movement of joy.

"Upon my word," pursued he, gaily. "I never complain; it is only now that I begin to regret those riches for which I have always cared so little."

"Do not distress yourself about that, sir. In this affair you bring courage and devotion; leave me to bring that money which you have not."

"On my word, madame," answered the artist, "since you so frankly put the

question, I accept, then, the money that you shall consider fitting to place at my disposal; but, of course, I shall render you an account of it."

"Pardon, sir; it is not a loan that I offer to make you; it is my part in the association."

"I understand it so; only if I spend your money, will it not be necessary that you should know in what way?"

"Well and good!" exclaimed the marchioness, going to a piece of furniture, of which she opened a drawer, from whence she took a rather long purse.

After having carefully closed the drawer, she presented the purse to the young man.

"There are there two hundred and fifty *onces** in gold," said she; "I hope that that sum will suffice."

"Oh, oh! madame, I hope not only that it will suffice, but that I shall have to give you back a part of this sum," answered he, respectfully taking the purse, and placing it carefully in his girdle. I have now a restitution to make you."

"To me, sir?"

"Yes, madame," said he, drawing off the ring that he had placed on his little finger, "this ring."

"It is mine, that I wrapped up in the letter," eagerly exclaimed the young girl.

The young man bowed, quite confounded.

"Keep that ring, sir," answered the marchioness; "my daughter would be vexed if you returned it."

"I will keep it, then," said he, with secret joy; "I will only come once more, ladies," said he, "in order not to arouse suspicion; that will be to tell you when all is ready; only every day, at my usual hour, I will pass before this house. When, in the evening, on my return towards home, you shall see me holding a *suchil* flower or a white rose in my hand, that will be a sign that our business proceeds well; if, on the contrary, I remove my hat and wipe my forehead, then pray to God, ladies, because new embarrassments will have risen. In the last place, if you see me pulling asunder the flower that I hold in my hand, you must hasten your preparations for departure; the very day of my visit we shall quit the town."

"Never fear," said the marchioness; "we shall forget nothing."

"Now, not another word; give your music lesson," said the abbess.

The painter seated himself at a table, and began to explain to them as well as he could the mysteries of black, of white, of crotchets, and of minims.

When, some minutes afterwards, the portress entered, she perceived three persons apparently very seriously occupied in estimating the value of notes, and the difference between the key of F and the key of G.

"My holy mother," hypocritically said the portress, "a horseman, saying that he is sent by the governor of the town, asks the favour of an interview with you."

"Very good, my sister. When you have re-conducted this gentleman, you will introduce this *caballero* to me."

The painter rose, bowed respectfully to the ladies, and followed the portress.

Without uttering a word, the portress guided him through the corridors that he had already traversed, as far as the gate of the convent, before which several horsemen, enveloped in long mantles, had stopped, to the general astonishment of the neighbours.

The painter, thanks to his looking like an old man, his little dry cough, and his trembling walk, passed in the midst of them without attracting their attention.

The portress made a sign to one of the horsemen, that she was ready to conduct him to the superior.

* £850 sterling.

Just at that moment, the painter, who had gone some little distance, turned to give a last look.

He suppressed a gesture of fright on recognising the horseman of whom we are speaking.

"Zeno Cabral!" murmured he. "What does this man do in the convent?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW.

The French painter was not deceived. It was indeed Zeno Cabral, the Montonero chief.

The portress walked with a hasty step, without turning her head, before the young man, who appeared plunged in sorrowful and painful reflections.

They proceeded thus for a considerable time through the corridors, without exchanging a word; but at the moment when they had reached the entry of the first cloister, the chief stopped, and lightly touching the arm of his conductress—

"Well?" said he, in a low voice.

The latter turned briskly, threw an inquiring look around her, and answered, in the same low and stifled tone, the single word—

"Nothing."

"How nothing?" cried Don Zeno, with suppressed impatience.

"I have watched," answered she, eagerly; "watched from evening to morning, and have discovered nothing."

"So much the worse," said the Montonero, coldly; "so much the worse for you, my sister; for if you are so little clear-sighted, it is not just yet that you will quit your post of portress for a superior employment."

The portress trembled; her little grey eyes gave a sinister look.

"I have discovered nothing, it is true," said she, with a dry and nervous laugh; "but I suspect, and soon I shall discover."

"Ah! and what shall you discover?" asked he, with ill-concealed interest.

"I shall discover," she pursued, "all that you wish to know, and more, too."

"Ah, ah!" said he, "and when will that be, if you please?"

"Before two days; but now, come, they expect you. This long stay may excite suspicion; more than ever, prudence is necessary."

They proceeded. At the moment when they entered the first cloister, a black figure came away from an obscure corner, where, until that moment, it had remained shrouded in darkness; and, after having made a threatening gesture to the portress, vanished like a fantastic apparition.

Arrived at the door of the superior's room, the portress knocked gently twice without receiving any answer; she waited a moment, and then knocked again.

"*Adelante*," was then answered from within.

She opened the door, and announced the stranger.

"Beg the gentleman to enter; he is welcome," answered the abbess.

The portress disappeared, and the general entered; then, on a sign from the superior, the portress withdrew, closing the door behind her.

The superior was alone.

At the entry of the young man she slightly inclined her head, and, with a gesture, directed him to a seat.

"Pardon me, madame," said he, bowing, "for thus disturbing your pious meditations."

"You are sent to me by the governor of the town," pursued she, in a tone of cold politeness. "You have no apologies to make me, but only to explain the reason for this visit."

"I am about to have the honour of explaining myself, madame," answered he, with a smile, taking the seat which she had pointed out.

There was a silence of two or three minutes.

The Montonero turned and re-turned his hat in his hands with a vexed air; while the abbess pretended to read a book.

The officer, feeling how strange his silence would appear, commenced the conversation with an ease which was too marked to be natural.

"Senora, I do not know what causes the displeasure that you appear to have in seeing me."

"You are in error, *caballero*," answered she, "as to the meaning I attach to my words. I do not feel any annoyance, believe me, at your presence; only I am vexed at being obliged to receive, without being prepared for it beforehand, the visits of envoys, whose place should be anywhere else than in the room of the superior of a convent of women."

"That observation is perfectly just, madame. Unhappily, it is a necessity to which you must submit."

"So," resumed she, with some sharpness, "you see that I submit to it."

"You submit to it—yes, madame," he pursued, in an insinuating tone. "but complaining at it, because you confound your friends with your enemies."

"I, senor! You make a mistake, no doubt," said she, with compunction; "you do not reflect on who I am. What friends or enemies can I have?"

"You deceive yourself, or, which is more probable—you do not wish to understand me."

"Perhaps, also, it is a little your fault, senor," she resumed, with a silght tinge of irony, "owing to the obscurity in which your words are enveloped."

"Come, madame," said Don Zeno, after a pause, "let us be candid. You have here two prisoners?"

"I have two ladies that I have received into this house on the express injunction of the governor. Is it of these two ladies that you speak?"

"Yes, senora, the same."

"These ladies have nothing, that I can see, to do with this conversation."

"On the contrary, madame, it is on their account alone that I come here."

"Very well, senor, continue; I am listening."

"I am about to explain my connection with these persons. To understand me, you must hear a rather prolix story."

"My time is yours."

"You overwhelm me, senora, and I thank you. My family is of Portuguese origin. My ancestor, Alvarez Cabral, after a quarrel with the Viceroy of Brazil, found his property seized. My great-grandfather took refuge in Buenos Ayres. On his death-bed he revealed to my grandfather and my father a secret of great importance; in a word, he stated to them that some time before his exile, in the last expedition that he had made, according to his custom, he had discovered diamond mines and deposits of gold of incalculable value. He entered into the minutest details as to the route that was to be followed to discover the country where these unknown riches were hidden; gave to my grandfather a map traced by himself on the very spot, and added, for fear that my grandfather should forget any important detail, a bundle of

manuscripts, in which the history of his expedition and of his discovery were related as a diary; then, certain that this fortune which he had left would not be lost to them, he gave his children his blessing, and died almost immediately."

"I do not yet see, sir, what relation there is between this history, and these two unfortunate ladies," interrupted the abbess, shaking her head.

"Some years passed," Don Zeno resumed; "my grandfather was at the head of the vast *chacra* occupied by our family, my father was beginning to aid him. He had a sister beautiful and pure as an angel. She was named Laura; her father and brother loved her to adoration; she was their joy and pride."

"This souvenir affects you, senor," said the abbess.

The young man proudly nerved himself.

"I have promised to tell you the truth, madam. My grandfather had placed the manuscript and the map in a place known only to himself and his daughter. One day a foreigner asked for hospitality, saying he belonged to a noble Portuguese family. My father received him with open arms. One day the stranger disappeared, carrying away my sister. Every search was useless. This man had somehow discovered my great-grandfather's secret. The odious elopement did not proceed from love."

"Then," interrupted the abbess, "why did he carry her off?"

"Because he believed that she possessed the secret that he wished to discover; that, madame, was the only motive for the crime."

"What you tell me is infamous, senor," cried the abbess; "this man was a demon."

"No, madame, he was a wretch devoured by the thirst for riches, and who, at any price, determined to possess them, even if to do so he had to bring dishonour and shame into a family."

"Oh!" she gasped, hiding her head in her hands.

"Now, madame, do you wish to know the name of this man?" he pursued, with bitterness; "but it is needless, is it not? for you have already guessed."

"But why render the innocent," said the abbess, "reponsible for crimes committed by others?"

"Because, madame—an inheritor of the paternal hatred for twenty years—it is only a fortnight ago that I have again found a trace that I thought was lost for ever; that the name of our enemy has, like a thunderclap, suddenly burst on my ear."

"So to satisfy a vengeance which might be just, brought to bear on the guilty, you would be cruel——"

"I do not know yet what I shall do, madame. My head is on fire; fury carries me away," interrupted he, with violence. "This man has stolen our happiness; I wish to take away his; it is between us a war of wild beasts."

At this moment the door of the adjoining room opened suddenly, and the marchioness suddenly appeared.

"A war of wild beasts let it be, *caballero;* I accept it."

The young man rose abruptly, and darting a look of crushing scorn at the superior:

"Ah! I have been listened to," said he, with irony; "well, so much the better, I prefer it to be so. You know now, madame, the cause of the hatred that I bear towards your husband."

"My husband is a noble *caballero,* who, if he were present, would wither the odious tissue of lies by which you have not scrupled to accuse him before a person," added she, "who would not, perhaps, have believed this frightful tale, the falsity of which is too easy to prove for it to be necessary to refute it."

"Be it so, madame; this insult, coming from you, cannot affect me; a time will

come, when the truth will be declared, and when the criminal will be unmasked before you."

"There are men, senor, whom calumny, however skilfully concocted, cannot reach," she answered.

"Let us cease this; I am not your enemy."

"But what are you then, and for what reason have you related this horrible story?"

"If you had had the patience to listen to me a few minutes more, madame, you would have learned."

"What prevents you telling me, now that we are face to face?"

"I will tell you if you desire it, madame," replied he, coldly. "I should have preferred, however, that some other person should perform this task."

"No, no, sir; I am myself a Portuguese, and my principle is to act for myself."

"As you please, madame; I was about to ask you to give me your word not to quit this town without my authority, and not to try and communicate with your husband."

"Ah! And if I had made this promise?"

"Then, madame, I should, in return, have freed you from the accusation which weighs upon you, and should immediately have obtained your liberty."

"Liberty to be a prisoner in a town, instead of in a convent!" said she, with irony; "you are generous, senor."

"But you would not have had to appear before a council of war."

"That is true; I forgot that you and yours make war on women—especially on women."

"I wait your answer," said the young man.

"*Caballero*," resumed the marchioness, in a haughty voice, "to accept the proposition you make me would be to admit the possibility of the truth of the odious accusation that you dare to bring against my husband."

"I expected that answer, madame, although it afflicts me more than you can suppose. You have, no doubt, well reflected?"

"On all—yes, senor."

"You are not alone, madame; you have a daughter."

"Sir," she answered, with an accent of supreme *hauteur*, "my daughter knows well what she owes to the honour of her house."

"Oh, madame!"

"Do not try to frighten me, senor; you will not succeed. My determination is taken. Men deceive themselves, if they think they alone possess the privilege of courage. It is good, from time to time, for a woman to show that they also know how to die for their convictions."

The *Montonero* bowed silently, made a few steps towards the door, stopped, and half turned as if he wished to speak; but, altering his mind, he bowed a last time and went out.

The marchioness remained an instant motionless; then, turning towards the abbess, and extending her arms to her—

"And now, my friend," said she to her, with a sorrowful voice, "do you believe that the Marquis de Castelmelhor is guilty of the frightful crimes of which that man accuses him?"

"Oh, no, no, my friend," cried the superior, melting into tears, and falling into the arms which opened to receive her.

CHAPTER V.

THE PREPARATIONS OF TYRO.

It was with a quick and deliberate step that the painter rejoined Tyro at the spot which the latter had assigned as a permanent rendezvous.

The place was well chosen; it was a natural grotto, not very deep, situated at two pistol-shots or so from the town, so well concealed from curious eyes by the chaos of rocks, and of thickets of parasitic plants, that, unless the exact position of this grotto were known, it was impossible to discover it—so much the more, as its mouth opened on to the river, and that to enter it, it was necessary to go into the water up to the knees.

Tyro, half-lying on a mass of dry leaves, covered with two or three Arancanian pellones * and ponchos, was carelessly smoking a cigarette of maize straw, while he waited for his master.

The latter, after being assured that no one was watching him, removed his shoes, tucked up his trousers, went into the water, and entered the grotto.

"Ouf!" said he, "a singular fashion this of coming into one's house. Here am I returned, Tyro."

"I see, master," gravely answered the Indian, without changing his position.

"Now," pursued the young man, "let me resume my clothes, and then we can talk. I have much to tell you."

And he immediately proceeded to abandon his disguise, and soon he had recovered his ordinary appearance.

"There—that's done?" said he, sitting near the Indian. "I tell you that this disgusting costume annoys me horribly, and I shall be happy when I shall be able to get rid of it altogether."

"That will be soon, I hope, master."

"And I also, my friend. Now, what have you to tell me? Speak, I am listening."

"But you—have you not told me you have news?"

"That is true; but I am anxious to know what you have to tell me. So speak."

"As you please, master," answered the Indian, throwing away his cigarette; then, half-turning his head towards the young man, and looking him full in the face—

"Are you brave?" he asked.

This question, put so suddenly unawares, caused such a profound surprise to the painter, that he hesitated an instant.

"Well," he at last answered, "I believe so; but, my good Tyro, bravery is in France so common a virtue, that there is no conceit on my part in asserting that I possess it."

"Good!" murmured the Indian, "you are brave, master; and so am I, I believe; I have seen you in several circumstances conduct yourself very well."

"Then why ask me this question?" said the painter.

"Do not be angry, master," quickly replied the Indian, "my intentions are good. You are a Frenchman—that is to say, a foreigner, not long in this country, of the customs of which you are completely ignorant."

"I admit that," interrupted the young man.

"In asking you, then, if you are brave, I do not doubt your courage, only I wish

* Sheepskins dyed and prepared.

to know if this courage is white or red; if it shines as much in darkness and solitude as in broad daylight."

"Thus put, I understand the question, but I do not know how to answer it. I can simply, and in all confidence, assure you of this—that day or night, alone or in company, in default of bravery, pride would always prevent me from retreating."

"I thank you for that assurance, master, for our task will be arduous."

"You can count on my word, Tyro," answered the painter; "so, banish all afterthoughts."

"That I will do, master, you may depend. Now, let us leave that, and come to the news."

"Just so," said the painter; "what is this news?"

"Do you know that the Spanish officers whom they were going to try have escaped?"

"Escaped!" cried the painter, "when?"

"This very morning; they passed near here scarcely two hours ago, mounted on horses of the pampas."

"Upon my word, so much the better for them—I am delighted at it, for, as matters go in this country, they would have been shot."

"They would have been shot certainly," said the Indian, nodding his head.

"That would have been a pity," said the young man. "Although I know very little about them, and they have placed me in a rather difficult position, I should have been sorry. So you are certain that they have really escaped?"

"Master, I have seen them."

"Then, bon voyage!"

"Do you not fear that this flight may be prejudicial?"

"To me! Why?" cried he, with surprise.

"Have you not been implicated in their affairs?"

"That is true, but I believe I have nothing to fear now."

"So much the better, master; however, if I may give you advice—believe me, be prudent."

"Come, talk candidly. I see behind your Indian circumlocutions a serious thought."

"Since you demand it, master, I will explain myself. The flight of the two Spanish officers has awakened suspicions which were but suppressed; and now they accuse you of having encouraged them in their project of flight."

"Why, that is impossible!"

"I know it, master; however, it is as I say."

"Then my position becomes extremely delicate; I do not know what to do."

"I have thought of that; we Indians form a population apart in the town. Disliked by the Spaniards, scorned by the creoles, we sustain one another, in order to be in a position to resist any injustice. Since I have occupied myself with preparations for your journey, I have communicated with several men of my tribe, engaged in the families of certain persons in the town, in order to be informed of all that passes, and to warn you against treachery. I knew yesterday that the Spanish officers were going to escape. For several days, aided by their friends, they have planned their flight."

"I do not yet see," interrupted the painter, "the relation between this flight and myself personally."

"Wait, master," pursued the Indian, "I am coming to that. This morning, the news of the flight of the officers was already known—everybody was talking of it. I mixed myself in several groups, where this flight was commented on. Your name was in every mouth."

"But I knew nothing of this flight."

"I know it well, master; but you have an enemy determined on your ruin who has spread abroad this report."

"An enemy!" said the young man; "impossible!"

The Indian smiled sarcastically.

"Soon you will know it, master," said he; "but it is you we must think of—you that we must save."

The young man shook his head sadly.

"No," said he, with a sad voice; "I see that I am really lost this time; better resign myself to my fate."

The Indian looked at him for some moments with an astonishment that he did not seek to dissimulate.

"Was I not right master," he resumed at last, "to ask you at the commencement of this conversation, if you had courage?"

"What do you mean?" cried the young man, suddenly collecting himself. "I do not understand you."

"Pardon me, master, for teaching you things of which you are ignorant. There is a courage that you must acquire—it is that which consists in appearing to give in when the strife is unequal—reserving yourself, while you feign flight, to take your revenge later. Your enemies have an immense advantage over you; they know you; they therefore act against you with certainty, while you do not know them."

"What you say is full of sense, Tyro; only you speak to me in enigmas. Who are these enemies?"

"I cannot yet tell you their names, master; but have patience."

"Have patience!—it's very well to say that. Unhappily, I am up to my neck in a trap."

"Leave it to me, master; I will answer for all. You will escape more easily than you think."

"Hum! that appears to me very difficult."

"All the whites are like this," murmured the Indian, as if he were speaking to himself; "in appearance their conformation is the same as our own, and, nevertheless, they are completely incapable of doing the least thing by themselves."

"It is possible," answered the young man.

There was a short interval of silence between the two men, and then the Indian resumed.

"Master," said he, "as soon as I was informed of what had passed, convinced that I should not be unsupported by you, I laid my plans. My first care was to go to your house. They know me; the greater part of the attendants are my friends. I was free to go and come as I liked, without attracting attention. I then took advantage of a time when the house was almost deserted, to carry away all that belongs to you, even to your horses, which I loaded with your baggage, and your boxes full of papers and linen."

"Well," interrupted the young man, with a satisfaction clouded by slight anxiety; "but what will my countryman think of this proceeding?"

"Do not let that distress you, master."

"Be it so; you no doubt found a plausible pretext."

"That is just it," said he, with a chuckle.

"Very well; but now tell me, Tyro; what have you done with this baggage? I should by no means like to lose it—it contains the best part of my fortune. I cannot camp out in the open air, more especially as that would avail me nothing; on the other hand, I can scarcely see in what house I can lodge."

The Indian laughed.

"Eh! eh!" gaily said the young man. "As you laugh, it is, perhaps, because my affairs go on well"

"You are wrong, master. I am immediately going to seek some spot where you will be safe."

"The devil! that is not so easy to find in the town."

"But it is not in the town that I look for it."

"Oh, oh! where then? I scarcely see that there is any place in the country."

"That is because you do not, like we Indians, understand the desert. About two miles from here, in a rancho of the Guaranis Indians, I have found an asylum."

"You strangely pique my curiosity. Is everything prepared to receive me?"

"Yes, master."

"Why do we then remain here?"

"Because, master, the sun has not yet set, and it is too light to venture into the country."

"You are right, my brave Tyro; I thank you for this new service."

"I have only done my duty, master."

"Hum! Well, since you wish it, I consent. Only, believe that I am not ungrateful. So that is agreed. I am unhoused. My dear compatriot will be much astonished when he finds that I have left without taking leave of him."

The Indian laughed, without answering.

"Unhappily, my friend," continued the young man, "this position is very precarious."

"Depend upon me, master; before three days we shall have set out. All my measures are taken accordingly. My preparations would have been finished already, if I had had at my disposal a sufficient sum to purchase some indispensable things."

"Do not let that disturb you," cried the young man, putting his hand into his pocket, and drawing from it the purse which the marchioness had given him.

"Oh!" said the Indian, with joy, "there is much more than we want."

But suddenly the painter became sad, and took the purse again from the hands of the guaranis.

"I am mad," said he. "We cannot use that money, it is not ours; we have no right to make use of it."

Tyro looked at him with surprise.

"Yes," continued he, gently shaking his head, "this sum has been given to me by the person whom I have promised to save."

"Well!" said the Indian.

"Why, now," resumed the young man, "the affair appears to me to be quite altered."

"Your situation is just the same, master; you can keep the word that you have given. I have foreseen all."

"Come, explain yourself; for I begin no longer to understand you at all."

"Do not let that distress you. I only know as much about your affairs as I ought to know, to be useful to you in case of need, and to be in a position to prove to you what is my devotion for you. Moreover, if you wish it, I will appear to know nothing."

"That is a good joke!" exclaimed the young man, laughing. "Come, since it is not even possible to keep my secrets to myself, act as you like."

"Only give me this gold, and leave me to act."

"Well, I think that is the best; take it then," added he, putting the purse in his hand; "only, make haste."

"Oh! just now nothing presses. They believe you are gone; they are searching for you far away."

"That is true. If it only concerned myself, upon my word I have so great a confidence in my own skill, that I should not hurry myself at all, I assure you."

"Yes," he interrupted, "I know what you wish to say, master. These ladies are anxious to be off, and they are right. I only ask two days; is that too much?"

"No, certainly; only I confess there is one thing which much embarrasses me at present, and that is how I shall introduce myself into the convent to warn them."

"That is very simple; you will go in the convent in the same disguise that you assumed yesterday."

"Hum! You think that is not risking too much?"

"Not the least in the world, master. Who will care to concern himself about a poor old man?"

"Well, I will try; if I fail, I shall have done my duty."

The more the young Frenchman became intimately acquainted with the guaranis, the more he discovered intelligence in this poor Indian, so simple and so artless in appearance, and the more he congratulated himself on having trusted him.

About half-an-hour after sunset, the two men quitted the grotto.

The Indian, who, notwithstanding the darkness, appeared to see as if it were broad daylight, guided his master through the intricate paths, apparently inextricable, but through which he proceeded with a certainty which indicated a complete knowledge of the places which he traversed.

The journey from the grotto to the place where they were to stay was short—it did not last longer than three-quarters of an hour.

Tyro stopped before a rancho of a sufficiently miserable aspect, built on the summit of a hill. He opened a door formed of an ox-hide stretched over a hurdle of willow.

The Indian struck a light with his flint and steel, and lit a lamp.

The interior of the rancho resembled the exterior, and was very miserable.

"Eh?" said Emile, casting a scrutinising look round him, "this rancho is abandoned, then?"

"By no means, master," answered Tyro; "but the occupants have withdrawn into the other room."

"Oh! oh! And for why?"

"Simply because, if they should come to look for us here, they could with a good conscience affirm that they have not seen you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the young man, "that is very good of them, good people that they are! Well, I see with pleasure that the Jesuits make good pupils as well in America as in Europe."

Tyro did not answer. He was in the act of removing with a pickaxe a slight layer of earth, under which soon appeared a trap-door. The Indian lifted it up.

"Come, master," said he.

"The devil!" murmured the young man, with some hesitation, "am I going to be buried alive?"

The Indian had already disappeared in the opening left gaping by the removal of the trap-door.

"Come," said the young man, "there is no time to hesitate."

He leant over the hole, perceived the first steps of a ladder, and boldly descended into the cave, where Tyro awaited him, the lamp being held towards him, to give him light, and prevent a false step.

This cavern was rather large and high, and completely furnished with palm-mats to absorb the moisture. All the baggage of the young man had been brought here, and was ranged with care.

A washing-stand, a couch, a table, and a hammock, hung in a corner, completed the simple furniture of the place.

Several candles and a lamp were placed on the table.

At each end of the cavern, the form of which was nearly oval, were galleries.

"Here is our temporary apartment, master," said the guaranis; "each of these galleries is carried, after a few turns, a good way into the country. In case of alarm, you have a safe retreat; your horses have been placed by me in the gallery

to the left; they have all they want. In this basket you will find provisions for three days. You have only to be patient."

While he thus spoke, the Indian had taken from the basket, and spread on the table, after having lit the lamp, provisions for the supper, of which the painter, who had fasted since he left the convent, began to feel the necessity.

"Now, master, I am going up into the rancho, to put everything in order, and to remove all traces of our movements. Good-bye, for the present, and keep up your spitits."

"Thank you, Tyro: but, in the name of heaven, remember that I trust entirely to you."

"Depend on me, master. Ah! I forgot to tell you that when I return, it will be by the gallery to the right. I shall imitate the cry of the owl three times before entering."

"Well, I will remember. Will you not keep company with me, and have supper?"

"Thank you, master, that is impossible."

"Well, do as you wish," answered the painter, suppressing a sigh; "I will not detain you any more."

The Indian remounted the ladder, disappeared through the opening, and, after having again bidden adieu to his master, reclosed the trap-door.

CHAPTER VI.

COMPLICATIONS.

The same day on which transpired the various events which we have related in our preceding chapters, about nine o'clock in the evening, two persons were seated in the room of the Duke de Montone. These two persons were the Duke de Montone himself, or M. Dubois, as he wished to be called, and the other General Don Eusebio Moratin, governor of the town of San Miguel.

General Moratin was about forty-one; he was short, but stout and well-built. His features would have been handsome, had it not been for the expression of cold calculation in his black and deeply sunken eyes.

This officer, whose memory is justly execrated, was born in 1770, at Monte Video. He was a pure gauchos, with all the savage independence and ferocity of the race. He had been for many years the captain of a band of assassins.

Although as a creole he had a sovereign contempt for everything foreign, and especially European, he spoke English and French very well—not from a liking to these languages, but from necessity, and in order to facilitate, by an apparent love of liberty, and the support of the great European powers, the ambitious views that he concealed in his heart.

The general, who had for some minutes been striding about the room, turned suddenly—

"Bah! bah!" said he, in a sharp voice; "I repeat, Monsieur le Duc, that your Zeno Cabral is but an arrant simpleton."

"Allow me, general——" objected the Frenchman.

"Come," he resumed, with violence, "be a politician! One must be mad to think so. A Montonero chief, who thinks of falling in love—of becoming sentimental! is

it thus that he acts? Eh! *mon dieu!* If the girl pleases him, let him take her! That's as simple as 'good day,' and does not require much diplomacy. I have experience in those matters myself. Do not speak to me any more of this man; there is nothing to be done with him."

The duke had listened to this impassioned outburst with coolness.

When the general had finished, he looked at him for a time, with a slightly mocking air, and then taking up the conversation—

"All that is very well, general," said he; "but this is, after all, only your individual opinion, is it not?"

"Certainly," said Don Eusebio.

"You would be very little pleased, I imagine," resumed he, smiling, "if the words you have just uttered were repeated to Don Zeno Cabral."

"I admit" said the general, "that I should be annoyed at it."

"Then," resumed the duke, "of what use is it to say things which one day or other you might regret?"

"You are right, my dear duke," said the general, laughing: "consider that I have said nothing."

"That is right, general—especially as at this moment you have the most pressing need of Don Zeno Cabral and his squadron."

"That is true; unhappily, I cannot do without him."

"A charming way of inspiring his confidence, to treat him as a simpleton!"

"Oh, forget that, and let us come, if you please, to business. I should like that everything was decided upon between us before he comes."

The Frenchman looked at the clock.

"We have still twenty minutes," said he; "that is more than necessary to decide upon everything. Now, what is your project?"

"To have myself declared president of the republic," he exclaimed, with violence.

"That is an additional consideration," interrupted the duke; "the best fish are always found in troubled water."

"To say that to me," said the general, with a burst of laughter; "I have never fished in any other but troubled water."

"Well, if you have succeeded up to the present time, you must continue."

"I should like to do so, but how?"

The duke appeared to reflect seriously for some minutes, while the general looked at him anxiously."

"See how unjust you are, my dear general," at last resumed the duke; "it is just this love of Don Zeno for the daughter of the Marchioness de Castelmelhor—a love that you have spoken of so bitterly—that will furnish you with those means you have been unsuccessfully seeking."

"I do not understand the least in the world what relation there can be between——"

"Patience!" interrupted the diplomatist. "What do you wish first? the immediate removal of Don Zeno Cabral, who, loved and respected by all as he is, can by his presence influence the votes of the deputies who are invited at this moment in the town to proclaim independence and elect a president."

"Just so; but Don Zeno will not consent, under any pretence, to go away."

The diplomatist slightly sneered, casting a look of pity on his companion.

"General," said he, "have you ever been in love?"

"I!" cried Don Eusebio, "you are jesting."

"Not the least in the world," answered he, calmly.

"To the devil with such a silly question!"

"Not so silly as you suppose, general, I repeat. Have you, or have you not, been in love?"

"Well, I have never been in love."

"Well, that's just the difference between you and Don Zeno Cabral, that he is in love."

"*Pardieu!* the good and important news that you tell me, my dear duke! but the conclusion!" cried the general, stamping with impatience.

"The conclusion is, that by exciting this love, we shall bring about the result we desire," calmly responded the duke.

"Well, you hardly explain yourself," resumed the general.

At that moment the door was opened wide, and a servant, dressed in a splendid livery, announced—

"His Excellency General Don Zeno Cabral."

The two men exchanged a rapid look of intelligence, and rose to salute the general.

"I am disturbing you, gentlemen?" said the latter, as he entered.

"Not the least in the world, Senor Don Zeno," replied the Frenchman; "on the contrary, we have been waiting for you with the greatest impatience."

"Pardon me for coming a few minutes earlier than the time you deigned to mention for our interview, Monsieur le Duc; but as I knew I should find his excellency the governor here, I hastened to come, having an important communication to make to him."

"Then you are doubly welcome, dear general," answered Don Eusebio.

The servant brought forward a chair, and withdrew.

"You were saying, dear Don Zeno," pursued Don Eusebio, "that you had an important communication to make?"

"Here is the affair in a few words," answered Don Zeno Cabral, with a bow. "The two prisoners, who were to have been tried to-morrow as spies by the council of war—Don Louis Ortego and the Count de Mendoza—that I myself arrested at the cabildo on the night of the *fête*, have escaped."

"Escaped!" cried the governor, with surprise.

"This very day, at sunrise, disguised as monks. Accomplices held their horses at the gates of the town."

"Oh! oh! That seems to me decided treason!" cried the general, knitting his eyebrows. "I will ——"

"Do nothing," interrupted Don Zeno; "any step would now be useless; they have fourteen hours in advance."

"When did you hear of this escape, of which no one has informed me?"

"In leaving the house of the Marchioness de Castelmelhor, where I had gone this morning, one of your aides-de-camp, general, who was looking for you, and wished to mount horse to join you, gave me the news of this flight; I immediately dispatched detachments in all directions in pursuit of the fugitives."

"Very good."

"These detachments have returned, except one, without learning any news of the prisoners."

"This is a serious affair, and which cannot but further complicate the difficult position in which we find ourselves just now."

"I did not stop there, Monsieur le Gouverneur," answered Don Zeno; "I went to the prison to ask the director about the escape; moreover, I dispersed through the town some intelligent persons, to report to me what they heard."

"You could not have been more prudent or better advised, my dear Don Zeno; I congratulate you."

"You give too much importance to so simple a thing."

"And what have you learnt?"

"Upon my word," replied Don Zeno, half turning towards the French diplomatist, "I have learnt one thing that will much astonish you, Monsieur le Duc."

"What?" said the duke, smiling; "have I, without knowing it, aided the flight of your prisoners?"

"Well," said Don Zeno, laughing, "it is something of that sort."

"Ah! upon my word!" cried the duke.

"Reassure yourself; you are not concerned in all this—only one of your friends."

"One of *my* friends! but I am a foreigner; there is no one except you that I know in the town."

"Just so," said Don Zeno, laughing; "it is one of your compatriots."

"One of my compatriots!"

"Yes, a certain Emile Gagnepain. It would appear that he has——"

"Continue—he has——"

"He has entertained relations with the prisoners, and finished by enabling them to escape."

A slight and scarcely perceptible smile played on the thin lips of the diplomatist at this revelation; but immediately regaining his coolness—

"As to that," answered he, "I can immediately prove to you the falsity of this accusation."

"I should like nothing better, for my part," said Don Zeno.

"How will you do that?" demanded Don Eusebio.

"You shall see; my compatriot, or rather, my friend, lives in this very house; I will have him called."

"Very good," observed the governor.

"Observe, Monsieur le Duc, that I affirm nothing," pursued Don Zeno—"that I in no way attack the honour of this *caballero*."

"It is of no consequence, gentlemen," cried the duke, with an expression of indignation; "if he were really guilty, I should be the first to abandon him."

The two men bowed without answering. The duke struck a bell.

A servant appeared.

"Inform Don Emile," said the duke, "that I wish to speak to him immediately."

"Senor Don Emile is not in his apartment, your lordship," answered the servant, bowing respectfully.

"Ah!" said the diplomatist, with astonishment; "still out at this hour! When he returns beg him to come here."

The servant bowed without moving.

"Have you not understood me?" resumed the diplomatist; "why do you not withdraw?"

"Your lordship," respectfully answered the servant, "Don Emile will not return."

"Don Emile will not return?"

"He this morning had all his baggage taken away by a man."

The duke made a sign for the servant to withdraw.

"This is strange!" murmured he, when the door had closed upon the valet; "what does this departure mean?"

The two creoles looked at each other.

"No," pursued the duke, decidedly, "I cannot yet believe him guilty."

"Senor Captain Don Sylvio Quiroga," again announced the servant.

"Let him come in," said Don Zeno.

And turning towards the duke—

"Pardon me, sir; Captain Quiroga is the last officer dispatched by me in pursuit of the fugitives. He is an old traveller."

"He will be very welcome, then," said Don Eusebio.

"Yes, we will welcome him," added the duke, "for I hope that the information he will give us will dissipate our doubts."

"God grant it!" said Don Zeno.

Captain Don Sylvio Quiroga appeared.

"Well!" asked Don Zeno, "have you found any trace of the fugitives, captain?"

"I have, general," he answered; "but here is the fact in a few words. At the moment when I was preparing to take them by the collar—for I was scarcely more than a pistol-shot from them—two or or three hundred horsemen unawares darted out of a little wood, and charged us with fury. As I had with me only eight men, I thought it prudent not to wait the attack of these enemies, that I was far from expecting so near me, and I immediately retreated with my companions."

"Oh! oh! what do you say?" cried Don Zeno; "you were afraid, perhaps, captain?"

"Upon my word, yes, general; I was afraid, and very much so," frankly answered the officer

"Were they, then, so terrible?"

"I returned immediately, at all speed, to inform you, general."

"And they are——?" demanded the governor, impatiently.

"They are Pincheyras, your excellency," coolly answered the old soldier.

This revelation came like a thunderbolt on those to whom he spoke. Don Zeno especially, and Don Eusebio appeared extraordinarily agitated.

"Pincheyras!" repeated they.

"Yes, and we shall soon know what they want. I have placed two men in ambush on their route."

"Well," cried the governor, rising quickly, "we cannot take too many precautions with such demons. Excuse me, Monsieur le Duc, for quitting you so abruptly; but the news brought by this brave officer is of the utmost importance. To-morrow, if you will permit me, we will resume this interview."

"When you please, gentlemen," answered the diplomatist: "you know that I am at your orders"

"A thousand thanks—to-morrow then. Are you coming with me, Senor Cabral?"

"Certainly, I am with you," answered the latter. "We cannot employ too much prudence in so grave a position."

The two generals immediately took leave of the duke, and went out, followed by the captain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PANIC.

It is difficult to form an idea of the rapidity with which bad news spreads—of the way in which it is disfigured in passing from mouth to mouth, constantly increasing and finishing, in a very short time, by returning to the author of it, so surcharged with statements, and embellished with details, that he cannot recognise it.

Captain Don Sylvio Quiroga had not, since his return to San Miguel, communicated with any other person but Don Eusebio Moratin and Don Zeno Cabral. His soldiers had, like himself, kept perfectly silent on what had passed during their short expedition in search of the fugitives; and yet the news had already made much way. It was no longer 300 men who had shown themselves in the environs of the town, but a formidable Spanish army, coming from Peru—pillaging, burning, devastating

everything on its route—and of which the ferocious squadron of the Pincheyras formed the advance guard.

Those who had seen them—for, as usual, there were people who asserted that they had seen this fantastic Spanish army, which existed only in their imaginations—were certain that they had heard the enemy utter the most terrible oaths of vengeance against the unfortunate insurgents.

People, furnished with torches, coming from no one knew where, traversed the town in all directions, crying—

"To arms! to arms!"

At these cries, at these lurid flames, which cast ill-omened reflections on the walls, the citizens came in all haste from their houses; the women and children wept and lamented—in a word, the panic had become in a few minutes so general, that the two officers, who, nevertheless, knew the truth, were themselves frightened, and asked themselves if the danger was not, in fact, greater than they had supposed it.

They mounted their horses, that their assistants were holding for them at the door of the duke's house, and set out at a full gallop towards the cabildo.

Notwithstanding the advanced hour the cabildo, at the moment when the governor and the Motonero entered it, was invaded by the crowd, and offered a spectacle of disorder and of fear.

The two officers were received with cries of joy and protestations of devotion.

The governor had considerable difficulty in re-establishing a little order.

But it was in vain that he tried to re-assure them in relating simply what had passed; they did not wish to believe him.

The tocsin sounded from all the churches; barricades were constructed at the corners of all the streets, which were constantly traversed by armed patrols of the citizens, whilst others bivouacked on the place.

The town at this time offered the aspect of a vast camp. It was useless to try and resist the torrent—the governor understood that. Despairing to re-establish security by ordinary methods, he pretended to give way to the views of the persons who surrounded him, and tried to organise the panic in giving orders for the defence of the city, and in dispatching aides-de-camp in all directions.

Don Zeno, after having exchanged a few words in a low voice with the governor, started off rapidly, followed by Captain Quiroga.

But his absence was not long. Soon a gallop of horses was heard, and Don Zeno re-appeared at the head of his *Montoneros*.

The sight of the partisans, in whose courage the inhabitants of San Miguel had full confidence, began by degrees to reassure the population.

So much the more as the *Montoneros*, after having attached their horses to the piquets, and placed their sentinels, mingled with the crowd, and began gently—talking with one and the other, at first pretending to enter into the prevailing ideas—to re-establish the facts so strangely disfigured, by relating the affair just as it really was.

However, at last it was found that the danger, though less than it was supposed, nevertheless existed, and that the nearness of the royalist Montoneros could not but be very disquieting for the common safety. General Moratin skilfully took advantage of the excitement of the population, by taking the most efficacious measures he could think of to resist an attack till reinforcements arrived.

Devoted officers superintended the construction of the barricades; on the terraced roofs of the houses stones were carried to crush the assailants; depôts of ammunition were established in various places; and barriers were closed and defended by numerous soldiers.

Meanwhile Don Zeno, at the head of forty resolute Montoneros, had set out on a journey of discovery.

All the deputies were assembled in the cabildo, in the hall of assembly.

The governor, wishing by his presence to assure the population, had mounted horse, and, followed by a numerous staff, had traversed the town in all directions, encouraging some, reprimanding others, and exciting the inhabitants to do their duty.

The whole night passed thus. At sunrise, calmness was somewhat re-established although every one preserved his arms, and remained at his post.

Don Zeno Cabral, who had left more than four hours to reconnoitre, had not returned.

Several aides-de-camp, dispatched by him to seek for the Montoneros, had returned without bringing news either of him or his detachment.

In the meanwhile an officer entered, leant towards the ear of the governor, and murmured some words which he alone heard.

Don Eusebio started and turned rather pale, but immediately recovering himself:

"Captain," said he, to the officer, "sound the order to saddle, and let all the squadron of Don Zeno Cabral mount horse."

The order was immediately executed; the Montonero left the town at a trot.

General Don Eusebio Moratin, mounted on a magnificent black horse, and dressed in a uniform covered with gold embroidery, rode at its head.

When the troop was in the open country, and some rising ground had hidden it from the gaze of the inhabitants, the general had a halt sounded, stationed the sentinels, and ordered the officers to come to him on a hillock, on the summit of which he had stopped, at about a hundred paces in advance of the squadron.

The latter immediately obeyed with an impatience mingled with curiosity.

When all the officers had arrived they ranged themselves in a circle round the general.

"Caballeros," the latter said firmly, "the time for dissimulation has passed; it is my duty frankly to explain to you the situation, especially as I have great need of your assistance."

"Speak, general," answered the officers; "we are ready to obey as if you were really our chief."

"I thank you, caballeros, and I count upon your promise. Here is what has happened: your chief, Don Zeno Cabral, deceived by a spy, has been, with a few men who accompanied him, surprised by a party of royal scouts. Everything leads to the belief that this party belongs to the formidable band of the Pincheyras. Don Zeno, after prodigies of valour, has been constrained to surrender, to prevent bloodshed."

The officers uttered exclamations of rage.

"The enemies are near," continued the general. "Not knowing of the flight of one of their prisoners, and feeling perfectly sure that their bold *coup de main* is still unknown to us, they have only withdrawn gently. The opportunity is, therefore, favourable to take our revenge, and to deliver our chief and your friends. Will you?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the officers, brandishing their arms. "At them! at them!"

"Very well," answered the general; "before an hour we shall have overtaken them. Remember that the men that attack us are bandits, with neither good faith nor law."

What General Moratin had announced to the officers of the squadron was true, or, at least, he thought it so.

Don Zeno Cabral left, as we have said, about two o'clock in the morning, at the head of a rather weak detachment, with the intention of making a reconnaissance. After having scoured the country for two or three hours, without discovering anything

suspicious, and without noticing any trace of the passage of an armed troop, he wished, before re-entering the town, to explore the borders of the river.

For a long time the Montoneros marched thus, beating the thickets and the underwood with the point of their lances, without discovering anything; and their chief, convinced that the enemy—if by chance he had ventured so near the town—had judged it prudent not to remain there any longer, gave the order to retreat; when all of a sudden, at the moment when it was least expected, a hundred men rose on all sides from the midst of the thicket.

Although surprised and harassed by an enemy of whose number they were ignorant, but whom they supposed to be much superior to themselves, the Montoneros were not the men to lay down their arms at the first blow.

There was, at first, terrible disorder—a terrible collision, hand-to-hand—in the midst of which Don Zeno Cabral was unhorsed, and thrown to the ground.

For a time his companions thought him dead.

It was then that one of them slipped unperceived into the midst of the trees and rocks and galloped hard to San Miguel to carry the news of the defeat of the Montoneros.

They were, however, far from being conquered. Don Zeno Cabral had almost immediately risen, and had reappeared at the head of his men.

"However, the assailants were too numerous for the Montoneros to have the hope—not of conquering them, they had no thought of that—but of escaping from the scrape into which they had fallen.

Don Zeno Cabral perceived at a glance the difficulties of the ground on which it was necessary to fight.

All his efforts were then directed to enlarge the field of battle.

The chief of the patriots knew with what enemies he had to contend: their red ponchos had caused them to be recognised as soon as daylight had come.

For during the desperate combat that the troops had been waging, the sun had risen.

Unhappily the light of day revealed the small number of the patriots.

The Pincheyras, furious at having been so long held in check by so feeble a detachment, redoubled their efforts to completely defeat them.

But the latter were not discouraged; led a last time to the charge by their intrepid chief, they rushed with fury on their enemies.

The Montoneros had succeeded in overturning the human barrier raised before them, and had gained the plain.

But at the price of what sacrifices!

Twenty of their men were lying lifeless on the rocks—the survivors, to the number of about fifteen at the most, were, for the most part, wounded and weighed down by the fatigue of the unequal combat they had so long to sustain.

All was not finished, however; for the patriots to find themselves in open country was not to be saved.

Nevertheless, though still very bad, their situation was decidedly ameliorated.

The Pincheyras, to surprise their enemies, had been obliged to dismount, and to hide their horses some paces from them.

When the Montoneros had succeeded in opening a passage, the Pincheyras precipitated themselves immediately towards the spot where they had left their horses.

There was then compulsorily a pause, by which Don Zeno Cabral and his companions profited.

The chief of the Pincheyras, a man of tall figure, with energetic and marked features, and a harsh and cruel expression—still young, and who, during the combat, had performed prodigies of valour, and had furiously pressed Don Zeno Cabral himself, soon appeared almost lying on his horse, furiously brandishing his lance, and shouting with loud cries the twenty horsemen by whom he was followed.

The other Pincheyras were not long in overtaking him, emerging successively from the midst of the rocks and the clusters of trees.

The Montoneros, to give less chance to their enemies, had dispersed over a large space. They stretched themselves over their horses, hanging on one side by the stirrup, and holding the bridle with one hand, to avoid the bolas and the lagos, that their enemies, while rapidly galloping, flourished round their heads.

This man-hunt presented a most stirring spectacle, full of strange incidents.

The Pincheyras—owing to the fresh horses they rode—approached rapidly. A few minutes more and they would arrive within reach of those whom they pursued, when, on a sudden, the earth resounded under the rapid gallop of a considerable troop of horsemen, and General Don Eusebio Moratin, followed by the whole squadron of Don Zeno Cabral, charged furiously upon the royalists.

The latter, surprised in their turn, when they already thought themselves conquerors, uttered cries of rage, and immediately turning ther bridles, they endeavoured to escape in all directions. Don Zeno, burning to draw a brilliant vengeance from what he considered an affront, affectionately grasped the hand of the general; and, although overcome by fatigue, and wounded, put himself at the head of his squadron, and dashed with it upon the Pincheyras.

Speedily the bolas and the lagos flew on all sides, and the horsemen, hurled from their saddles, rolled on the ground with cries of rage and anguish.

The strife was short, but terrible. Surrounded by the squadron, the Pincheyras, despite a desperate resistance, were defeated, and obliged to surrender.

Scarcely twenty-five survived; the others, strangled by the la os wounded by the lances, or their skulls broken by the terrible bolas, lay stretched upon the field.

One man only had escaped; it was the chief:

Hemmed in by the Montoneros, trapped like a wild beast, he had penetrated into a thick cluster of mastic-trees and trees of Peru, whither the patriots had almost immediately followed him.

The Pincheyra had coolly fa ed his pursuers; with the last shot from his carbine he had killed one of those who most closely pressed him, and then, with a laugh of disdain, he had buried himself in the thicket.

Vainly the Montoneros, exasperated by the desperate resistance of this man, and the last death he had caused, started after him to capture him. For more than an hour they searched the ground foot by foot, inch by inch; separated the branches in the wood, and struck the ground with their lances.

He had become invisible. All search was vain—they could not find him again; and the Montoneros felt compelled to give up the pursuit.

The general had the order to depart sounded, though much against his liking.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SOLITARY.

We must now return to the French painter that we have left buried, so to say, at the bottom of a cavern, philosophically making up his mind to this voluntary seclusion.

Obliged to remain alone during a considerable time, and not knowing how to employ himself, the young man prolonged his meal as much as possible; and then

lit a cigar, and began to smoke with the beatific resignation of a Mahometan, or a drinker of *hatchich.* After this cigar he smoked another, then another, and then another, followed immediately by a fourth; so that midnight came almost without his perceiving it, and he laid himself upon his hammock without being wearied.

However, Emile had too nervous an organisation to content himself long with this kind of life. It was with a sigh of regret that he closed his eyes and slept.

How long had he remained plunged in sleep, he could not tell. Suddenly he jumped up, sat up in his hammock, casting around him a look of fright.

In the midst of his sleep he suddenly thought he heard cries, and the trampling of horses, mingled with deadened sounds. For some time these sounds were mingled and incorporated with the events of his dream.

But soon these cries and trampling acquired such an intensity that they awakened him from his sleep.

At first he took no account of what he heard, believing that it was but a sound existing only in his imagination.

But when, by degrees, he succeeded in recovering his ideas, and when he felt that he was completely awake, he acquired the certainty, not only that this noise was real, but that it every moment increased, and had become very loud.

However, all was calm around the young man; the lamp—the wick of which he had lowered when he lay down, so that its too brilliant light might not hinder his sleeping—shed a gentle and uncertain light, but strong enough to enable him to assure himself at a glance that all was in the state in which he had left it on retiring to bed, and that he was still alone.

He rose, a prey to extraordinary agitation.

The first thought that occurred to him was that his retreat was discovered, and that they wished to arrest him; but he soon admitted the absurdity of this supposition, and re-assured himself; the people charged to secure him would simply have entered the cavern, and would have had no combat to sustain.

But what could be the cause of this frightful tumult which still continued quite near to him?

This extremely puzzled the young man, and awakened his curiosity to the highest pitch.

He looked at his watch. It was half-past five in the morning.

Outside, then, it was daylight. It could not be a gathering of wild beasts, the sun making them retire into their caves; moreover, these animals would not dare to venture so near the town.

Was it a battle? But a battle in the middle of the night, almost at the gates of San Miguel, was not admissible.

For a moment the young man thought of knocking at the trap-door, to get it opened.

But he reflected that the *rancheros* were supposed to be ignorant of his presence among them.

But as—as we have said—his curiosity was excited to the highest degree, and as, in the precarious situation he was in it was important for him—at least, he gave himself this reason to justify in his own eyes the step he wished to take—to know what was passing around him, in order to know how to act; he resolved to act without further delay, and learn the causes of this extraordinary uproar, which had so suddenly troubled his repose.

He therefore rose, took a sabre, passed a pair of pistols in his girdle, seized a carbine, and thus armed, and ready for any event, he lit a lantern, and proceeded towards the passage on the right—the side from whence the sound appeared to come.

This passage, or rather this gallery of the cavern, was large enough for two

persons to walk abreast; its walls were high and dry, and the ground was covered with a fine yellow sand, which completely stifled the sound of steps. The gallery had several turnings.

After a short time the young man reached a room which at the moment served for a stable.

The animals appeared frightened; they were drooping their ears, and violently snorting, as they tried to break the cords which bound them to the manger, furnished with a copious supply of provender.

The painter patted them with his hand, caressed them, and tried to re-assure them.

The further he advanced into the gallery, the more the noise became intense. It was no longer cries and trampling that he heard, but the sound of fire-arms, and the clashing of sabres.

Doubt was no longer possible; a furious combat was being fought a few steps off.

This certainty, far from stopping the young man, increased his desire to know positively what was passing; he almost ran to reach the end of the gallery.

There he was obliged to stop; an enormous stone hermetically sealed the entrance of the cavern.

But this stone could evidently be moved; but what means could he employ to obtain that result? He knew not.

Then, with the help of his lantern, he proceeded to examine the stone above, below, and on the sides, seeking how he might succeed in removing it.

For nearly half-an-hour he gave himself up to an inspection as careful as it was useless, and he began to despair of discovering the secret which evidently existed, when suddenly he thought he saw the stone slightly move.

Emile was a bold fellow, endowed with a large share of coolness and energy. His mind was made up in a moment, and mentally thanking the individual, whoever he was, who was sparing him the long and fatiguing labour which he did not know how to bring to a successful termination, he quickly placed himself in concealment in a corner of the gallery, placed his lantern on the ground near him, taking care to cover it with his hat, so that its light might not be perceived. Seizing a pistol in each hand, to be ready for anything, he waited with his eyes fixed on the stone, which, owing to the numerous fissures in the walls of the gallery, he could easily distinguish—a prey to a strange emotion, which caused his heart to beat violently, and his blood to rush to his brain.

His watching was not long. Scarcely had he concealed himself before the stone was detached and rolled on the ground, and a man, holding in his hand a carbine, the barrel of which was still smoking, quickly entered the cavern.

The man leant forward towards the aperture, appeared to listen for a few seconds, and then stood up, murmuring loud enough for the young man to hear him—

"They come, but too late; the tiger has now escaped."

And skilfully aiding himself with the barrel of the carbine, as with a lever, he rapidly replaced the stone in its previous position.

"Search, search, *perros malditos*," said the unknown, with an ironical sneer, "I do not fear you now."

And with the greatest coolness he proceeded to reload his gun. Rushing from his concealment, the painter stood face to face with the unknown, and, presenting his pistols—

"Who are you? what do you want?" he demanded.

"Eh! What is this?" cried the unknown; "am I, then, betrayed?"

"Betrayed!" repeated the Frenchman, prudently placing his foot on the carbine; "the expression seems to me rather strange from your mouth, senor."

But it was only the work of a minute for the unknown to regain his coolness.

"Replace your pistols in your girdle, senor," he said; "they are not wanted here."

"I am pleased to hear it," answered the painter; "but what guarantee do you give me?"

"My word as a gentleman," he replied, with dignity.

Although the painter had been but a few months in America, he had been often enough in a position to study the character of the inhabitants of the country to know what reliance he might place on this word so proudly given. So, after having affirmatively nodded his head—

"I accept it," said he, uncocking his pistols, and placing them in his girdle.

"Thank you," laconically answered the unknown, holding out his hand: "I expected nothing less."

"The tumult appears to go farther off; your pursuers, no doubt, give up seeking for you any longer. Follow me; I am, I believe, in a position to offer you better hospitality than you think."

"At the present moment, I want two things."

"What?"

"Food, and two hours' sleep."

"And then——"

"Then—unhappily that does not depend upon you."

"What is it, then?"

"A good horse to carry me as quick as possible to rejoin my companions, that I have left twenty leagues from here."

"Very well. You shall first eat; then you shall sleep, then, when you have reposed long enough, you shall choose which of my horses suit you best."

They quitted the extremity of the gallery, and proceeded to the room.

"There are the horses," said the young man, as he passed through the stable.

"Good!" simply said the other.

When they were in the cavern, the unknown looked around him with wonder.

"What does this mean?" said he; "do you really live here, then?"

"For a time, yes. I, like yourself, am proscribed?"

"How? you—a Frenchman?"

"Nationality has nothing to do with the matter," said the young man, laughing; "sit down and eat."

And, after having brought forward a chair, he placed provisions on the table.

"And you—will you not also eat?" asked the unknown.

"Pardon—I intend to keep you company."

The two took their places, and began the meal.

"Look you," said the unknown, after a pause, "I wish to give you a proof of the entire confidence I have in you. Would you like to gain 15,000 piastres!"

"Pooh!" said the young man, with a pout.

"You do not care for money?" said the unknown.

"Upon my word, no! It is not worth the trouble."

"But it is easy for you, without the least trouble, to gain this money."

"That is another affair. Let me see your plan."

"Have you heard of four Pincheyra brothers?"

"Often."

"Well, I am a Pincheyra," said he, looking at him fixedly.

"Bah!" cried the young man, turning round; "it is a strange meeting."

"Is it not? I am Don Santiago Pincheyra, the second of the four brothers."

"Very good, I am delighted at having made your acquaintance."

"My head is worth 15,000 piastres. Well, give me up; they will give you the money, and, more than that, they will pardon you."

"*Vive Dieu!*" cried the Frenchman, striking the table with his fist, "do you know that you insult me?"

Don Santiago remained motionless and smiling; he held out his hand to the young man.

"On the contrary," he said; "I give you a proof of the confidence I have in your honour, inasmuch as without your having asked who I am, I have told you; and now, knowing that I am completely in your power, I am going to stretch myself in your hammock, where I shall sleep under your protection."

"Well, sir," answered the young man, still with some little resentment, "I admit your explanation."

"I confess that I am wrong, and I ask pardon for it again, senor; so, give me your honest hand, and forget it."

The young man took the hand that the Pincheyra offered him, and resumed his place at the table. They continued their meal without any fresh incident.

The Pincheyra was so overcome by fatigue, that, towards the end of the repast, he fell asleep talking.

"Now," said the painter, "you have appeased your appetite, you have another want, more imperious still, to satisfy; it is time that you went to sleep, so as to be speedily in a position to join your friends."

"True," said Don Santiago, laughing, "I am sleeping as I sit; I really do not know how to excuse myself."

Pardieu! by lying down; that, I think, is the only thing you have to do at this moment."

"Upon my word, you are right; I will, without any further delay, profit by your counsel."

In speaking thus, he rose with some little difficulty, so overcome was he by fatigue, and, aided by the young man, he stretched himself on the hammock.

Again free to give himself up to his own thoughts, the young man lit a cigar. installed himself comfortably in a seat, and, while digesting his breakfast, he began to reflect on this new episode of his varied life which had just been unexpectedly grafted on the others, and which would, perhaps, still more complicate the numberless difficulties of the position in which he found himself.

"This time," said he, "I can boldly say that I have had no hand in what has happened, and that this man has really come to me when I by no means sought him. How will all this finish? Suppose Tyro does not come! Devoted as the brave fellow may be to me, I fear the allurement of 15,000 piastres—a very large sum for any one who knows how to gain it honestly—may induce him to give up my guest and myself."

Several hours passed, during which the Montonero chief slept soundly.

At last, about one o'clock in the afternoon, Emile thought that the Montonero had sufficiently slept. He approached him, and touched him lightly on the shoulder, to awaken him.

The latter instantly opened his eyes, and bounced like a coyote out of the hammock.

"What is the matter?" demanded he, in a low voice.

"Nothing that I know of," answered the other.

"Then, why wake me, when I was sleeping so well?" said he, gaping.

"Because you have slept enough, and it is time to go."

"Time to go! already! You are chary of your hospitality, master. Well, I will do what you wish," he added.

"You do not embarrass me, senor," answered the young man; "if it only depended upon me, you might remain here as long as you please."

"But on whom does it depend, then?"

"On the Indian servant who has concealed me here, and who, probably, will not be long before he pays me a visit. Consider whether it would suit you to be seen by him."

"Not the least in the world! To trust myself to an Indian would be to be irretrievably lost."

"I do not know precisely when he will come, but I expect him from one moment to another."

"The deuce! with your permission, *I* will not expect him. If you will permit me, I will set out at once."

"Come and choose your horse."

The Montonero seized his carbine, which he loaded as he walked, and they went into the gallery.

The choice did not take long. The three horses were equally young, full of blood, fire, and swiftness. The Montonero, a good judge, saw this at a glance, and took one haphazard.

"What is unfortunate for me in all this," said he, quickly saddling his horse, "is, that I am obliged to leave the same way as I came, and that I run the risk of falling into an ambuscade. There used to be a second gallery in this cavern.

"This gallery is still there. You can easily go out that way."

"If it is so, I am saved," cried the Montonero, with joy.

"Silence!" said the young man, in a low voice; "I hear some one walking."

The Pincheyra listened, and heard the sound of steps close by.

"Oh!" cried he, with a gesture of despair.

"Remain here! Let me act—I'll answer for all," the young man quickly whispered.

And he briskly darted into the cavern. It was time. Tyro was about to look for him in the gallery.

CHAPTER IX.

THE INDIAN.

At the moment when the painter came out of the gallery in the cavern, he found himself face to face with Tyro, who, having entered by the opposite gallery, and not finding him in the room, was going to seek for him in the stable.

The two men remained a short time motionless and silent, facing each other, carefully examining each other.

The situation threatened to become critical. The Frenchman saw that he must, at any price, get out of it; so he resolved on speaking boldly, persuaded that this was the best means of escaping from his embarrassment.

"You here, at last, Tyro!" he cried, feigning great joy; "I began to feel uneasy at this seclusion."

"It was impossible for me to come sooner, master," answered the Indian, giving a cunning glance from under his eyelashes. "You have found everything in order here."

"Perfectly. I must confess that I have passed an excellent night."

"Ah!" said the guaranis; "you have heard nothing? Has there been no unusual noise to disturb your sleep?"

"I only waked about half an hour ago."

"So much the better, master. I am delighted. If you did not tell it to me so decidedly, I frankly confess I should scarcely have believed you."

"Why?" asked he, with feigned astonishment.

"Because, master, the night has been anything but tranquil."

"Ah! bah!" cried he; "what has happened, then? You understand I am ignorant of everything."

"A desperate battle has been fought close by here, between the Spaniards and the patriots."

"The devil! And this combat is over?"

"Otherwise, should I be here, master?"

"That is right, my friend. And who have got the best of it?"

"The patriots. Master," continued he, "what have I done to lose your confidence?"

Emile felt that he blushed; however, he answered—

"I do not understand this reproach that you address to me, my brave friend."

"What good will it be," pursued the guaranis, "since you mistrust me?"

"I mistrust you!" cried the young man, who felt that he was to blame, but who did not believe himself authorised to give up the secret.

"Certainly, master. Look at these two glasses and two plates; look, moreover, at these remains of cigars."

"Well?"

"Well, do you think, then, that, if I did not know already, these things would not be sufficient to prove to me the presence of another person."

"How? What do you know?"

"I know, master, that a man, whose name, if I chose, I could easily tell you, this morning entered the cavern, that you have given him hospitality, and that at the moment I am speaking, he is still here—hidden there."

"But then," cried the young man, violently, "since you are so well informed, you have betrayed me?"

"So, he is really here!" said the Indian, with a gesture of joy.

"Have you not just told me so yourself?"

"True, master, but I feared that he had already gone."

"Ah! but what does all that mean? I am quite at a loss to understand it."

"It is, nevertheless, very simple, master; call this man; all will be explained in a few words."

"*Ma foi!*" cried the young man, in an ill-humoured tone; "call him yourself, since you know him so well"

"You are angry with me, master; you are wrong, for in everything that occurs I should only act for you."

"It is possible, but I am annoyed at the absurd part I am condemned to play."

"Oh, master, do not complain; for this time, I assure you, Fate, as you call it, has shown rare intelligence; and you will soon have a proof of it."

"I should like nothing better."

"Will you permit me, master?"

"Are you not in your own place? Do what you like."

After having answered, by this outburst, the young man threw himself on a seat, and lit a cigar with the most careless air he could affect.

The Indian looked at him a moment with an indefinable expression, and then, taking his hand, and kissing it respectfully—

"Oh, master!" said he, in a gentle and somewhat trembling voice, "do not be unjust towards a faithful servant."

And then he strided towards the gallery.

"Come, Don Santiago," cried he, with a loud voice, stopping at the entrance, "you can show yourself."

The sound of a quick step was heard, and the Montonero almost immediately showed himself.

After having cast a glance around him, he advanced briskly towards the guaranis, and, grasping him heartily by the hand—

"*Vive Dios!*" cried he; "my brave friend, I am happy to see you here!"

"And so am I, senor," respectfully answered the Indian; "but first permit me to ask you a favour."

"If it depends on me, I will do so willingly."

"Will you be good enough to explain to this gentleman, who is my master, what has passed between you and me the last two days?"

"What!" said the Spaniard, with surprise; "this *caballero* your master—my friend; the meeting is strange!"

"It may be that I had prepared it, or at least tried to arrange it," answered the Indian.

"That's possible, after all," said the Spaniard.

"You know that I do not understand a word of what you are saying," interrupted the Frenchman with suppressed impatience.

"Speak, Don Santiago, I beg you."

"This is what has occurred," pursued the Montonero. "For certain reasons, too long to tell you—and which, moreover, would very little interest you, I am convinced—I am the friend of this brave Indian, to whom I cannot, and do not wish to refuse anything. Two days, ago, then, he came to me, at one of my habitual rendezvous that he has long known, and made me promise to come here with some of the men of my squadron, in order to protect the flight of several persons in whom he is much interested."

"Hum!" cried the young man; "continue, continue, senor; this becomes interesting."

"So much the better; only you do wrong to throw away your cigar on that account. I have come, then. Unhappily, notwithstanding all the precautions that I have taken, I have been discovered, and—you know the rest."

"Yes, but *you* do not know it, senor, and I am going to tell you," answered the Indian.

"I should like nothing better."

"One moment!" cried the painter, holding out his hand to the guaranis. "I owe you an apology, Tyro, for my unjust suspicions. I offer it from the bottom of my heart."

"Oh, that is too much, master; your goodness confounds me," answered the guaranis, with emotion. "I only wished to prove to you that I am still your faithful servant."

"There remains not the least doubt of that, my friend."

"Thank you, master."

"Yes, yes," murmured the Spaniard; "believe me, senor, these red-skins are better than they are generally supposed. Now, my brave friend," added he, addressing Tyro, "tell me what I do not know."

"The result—here it is, senor; you have been betrayed."

"*Vive Dios!* I feared so; you know the traitor?"

"I know him."

"Good!" said he, joyfully rubbing his hands; "you will no doubt tell me his name."

"It is useless, senor; I intend to chastise him."

"As you please."

"Believe me, senor—you or me—he will lose nothing," pursued the Indian, with an accent of hatred it would be impossible to render.

"I will not cavil any longer with you on that; let us return to our business."

"Do you not know me, Don Santiago?" said the Indian; "the evil has been repaired."

"Good! that is to say——"

"That is to say, that I have myself carried the news of your defeat to your friends; that to-night twenty-five horsemen will arrive here, where we shall conceal them, whilst fifty others will await your return to Vado del Nandus, ambuscaded in the rocks."

"Perfectly arranged all that—perfectly, my master," said the Spaniard. "But why should I not go myself, just to meet my friends?"

"Don Santiago," answered the Indian, "but you forget that I have asked you to render me a service."

"That is true! I do not know where my brains are at this moment; excuse me, I beg."

"I thank you. Now, master," added he, turning towards the young man, "it is necessary that this very day the ladies that you know should quit San Miguel; to-morrow would be too late. You must go immediately and resume your disguise. You will arrive just at sunset, only you must make haste."

"The devil!" murmured the painter, "but how shall I conduct these ladies here?"

"Do not let that disturb you, master; at the gate of the convent a guide will await you."

"And that guide——?"

"Will be me, master."

"Can I resume my nap?" asked the Spaniard.

"Certainly, nothing will prevent you; especially as I shall return in time to introduce your companions into the cave."

"Very well. Good fortune then."

And he stretched himself comfortably in the hammock, while Tyro aided his master to complete his metamorphosis, which did not take long.

The two men left the cavern, leaving the Spaniard in a sound sleep.

The gallery by which the master and the servant departed led out to the very bank of the river, and was so completely concealed, that unless any one had known of its existence, it would never have been suspected.

A boat, at a few paces off, awaited them.

Tyro immediately went towards it; he set it partly afloat, made his master enter, stepped into it himself, and then, taking the paddles, launched it into the current.

"We shall arive quicker thus," he said; "I can put you down at a few paces only from the spot where you are going."

The painter made a sign of assent, and they continued the route.

The head of the boat soon grated on the sand of the bank; they had arrived. The Frenchman landed.

"Good fortune!" murmured Tyro.

Spite of himself, on finding himself again in the midst of a town, where he knew he was looked for as a criminal, and tracked as a wild beast, the young man felt some emotion.

He knew that he was risking his head on a throw of the dice.

But Emile had a generous and intrepid heart; he had promised two ladies to try all he could to aid them; and had not for a moment the thought of failing in his word.

Under his disguise, he was well armed; and, moreover, his course was decided on; the rubicon was passed; he could not go back. He threw an inquiring look

around him, assured himself that the environs were deserted, and, after having a last time touched the pistols placed under his poncho in his girdle, he boldly entered the street.

Like the bank of the river, the street was a desert.

The young man affecting the somewhat trembling step of an old man, and looking carefully around him, took the side of the street opposite to that of the convent. Then, having arrived before the windows, he twice repeated the signal which he had agreed on.

"Suppose," said he to himself, "they have placed some one in concealment?"

Then after a pause, no doubt employed in still further bracing up his resolution, he crossed the street and approached the gate.

At the moment when he was preparing to knock, the gate opened.

He entered, and the gate shut immediately after him.

"Ouf!" said he, "here am I in the mousetrap; what is going to happen now?"

A nun stood before him.

They traversed silently and rapidly the long corridors and cloisters, and at last reached the chamber of the superior. The door was open.

One person only was in the chamber; this person was the superior.

The young man bowed respectfully to her.

"Well," she asked, briskly approaching him, "what has happened?"

"What has happened," he answered, "is, that if these ladies still have the intention to fly, all is ready."

"God be praised!" cried the superior, with joy, "and when shall they go?"

"Immediately; to-morrow it would be too late."

"It is but too true, alas!" said she, with a sigh; "so you can answer for their safety?"

"I can answer, madame, that I would suffer myself to be killed to defend them; a man cannot engage to do more."

"You are right, *caballero*."

"Now, madame, be so kind as to inform these ladies as soon as possible"

"They are aware of it already; they are now finishing their preparations."

"So much the better, for I am anxious to get in the open country. You know, madame, that you have offered me the means of facilitating our quitting this house."

"Do not distress yourself; what I have said I will do."

"A thousand thanks, madame; permit me one last observation."

"Speak, *caballero*."

"When I first came here, I thought I remarked—perhaps I was deceived—that the person who acted as my guide did not possess your entire confidence."

"Yes, senor, you were not deceived; but," added she, with a significant smile, "you will now have nothing to fear from the indiscretions of that nun; her post is occupied by a reliable person."

The young man bowed.

At the same moment a door opened, and two persons entered.

The darkness which began to prevail in the room prevented the Frenchman at first recognising these two persons, enveloped in thick mantles, and their heads covered with hats.

"We are lost!" murmured he.

"Stop!" sharply cried one of the two unknown, letting fall the lappit of her mantle, "do you not see who we are?"

"Oh!" cried the Frenchman, recognising the marchioness.

"I thought," she resumed, "that for the hazardous adventure which we undertake this costume would be better than our own."

"And you are most decidedly right, madame."

The young girl concealed herself timidly and tremblingly behind her mother.

"We will leave when you please, madame," pursued the young man.

"Immediately! immediately!" cried the marchioness.

"Very well," said the superior, "follow me."

They quitted the chamber.

The marchioness and her daughter each carried a light valise under their arms.

The marchioness also—no doubt to add to the correctness of her masculine costume—had a pair of pistols in her girdle, a sabre at her side, and a cutlass in her right *polena*.

The cloisters were deserted; a death-like silence reigned in the convent.

"You can go without any fear," said the superior.

"Where are the horses?" asked the marchioness.

"At a few paces from here," answered Emile; "it would have been imprudent to have brought them to the convent."

"That is true," answered the marchioness.

The painter was very uneasy. The last question of the marchioness, about the horses, reminded him—rather late in the day—that he had never thought of them. Carried away by the rapidity with which events had occurred since the arrival of Tyro in the cavern, he had left everything to the guaranis.

"Confound it," murmured he to himself, "suppose Tyro has no more memory than I?"

The four persons rapidly traversed the corridors, and were not long in reaching the gate of the convent. The superior, after having cast a searching look through the grating, to assure herself that the street was deserted, opened the door.

"Adieu, and the Lord protect you!" said she; "I have honourably kept my promise."

"Adieu, and thank you," answered the marchioness.

As to the young girl, she threw herself into the arms of the nun, and embraced her, weeping.

"Go! go!" quickly cried the superior.

The two ladies gave a last sad look at the convent and, enveloping themselves carefully in their mantles, they prepared to follow their protector.

"Which way do we take?" asked the marchioness.

"This," answered Emile, turning to the right—that is to say, proceeding to the river.

Was it by chance or intuition that he took this direction? A little of one and a little of the other.

A rather large barque, rowed by four men, was waiting, run aground on the bank.

"Eh!" said one of the men, in whom Emile immediately recognised Tyro; "here is the master."

The latter, without answering, made his companions enter the barque, and immediately stepped in after them.

On a sign from the Indian, the oars were shipped, and the barque drifted rapidly away.

The ladies gave a sigh of relief.

Tyro had thought that it would be better, on leaving, to resume the same mode of travelling, especially on account of the ladies, who, notwithstanding all their precautions, ran the risk of being easily discovered.

Thanks to the darkness—for the sun had set, and already the darkness was great—and especially to the breadth of the river, the barque keeping to the middle, the fugitives ran very little risk of being recognised.

They accomplished their passage in a very little time, and during all the time they did not meet any other boat than their own, except an Indian piroque containing a single man, which crossed them on their leaving the town.

But this piroque passed them too far off, and its course was too rapid, for it to be supposed that the man who was in it could perceive them.

They at last arrived at the entrance of the cavern.

We have said that the barque was rowed by four men.

Of these four men, two were gauchos, engaged by Tyro, and, as the guaranis had well paid them, he had a right to reckon on their fidelity. The third was a domestic of the painter's—an Indian whom the latter had left at San Miguel, without taking any heed of him, when he himself took flight. The fourth was Tyro himself.

When the barque touched the bank, the guaranis respectfully helped the two ladies to land, and then, going up to the entrance of the cavern—

"Will you, ladies," said he, "enter this cavern, where we will speedily rejoin you."

The ladies obeyed.

CHAPTER X.

ACROSS COUNTRY.

TURNING towards the two gauchos, who were carelessly leaning over the side of the boat—

"I have paid you, you are free now to leave us," said the guaranis to them, "unless you consent to make a new bargain with this gentleman."

"Let us see the bargain," answered one of the two gauchos.

"First, are you both free?"

"Yes; this *caballero* is my brother; his name is Mataseis, and mine Sacatripas; where one goes, the other follows."

Tyro bowed with a delighted air. The reputation of these two *caballeros* had long been known, and Tyro was well acquainted with it. They were two of the most noted bandits of all the Banda Orientale. Under present circumstances, nothing could have happened better.

"Very well," resumed Tyro, "I am happy, *caballeros*, I have to deal with men like you."

"Well, let us know what you want," answered Mataseis.

"Would you like to remain in the service of this *caballero?*"

"On what conditions? Besides, it would be well to know if the service will be hard," pursued Mataseis.

"It will be; it will commit you to do *all*, you understand—*all*," added he.

"That is the least consideration, if it pays well."

"Five *onces* per month each; will that suit you?"

The two bandits exchanged a look.

"Agreed," said they.

"Here is a month in advance," resumed Tyro, taking a handful of gold from his pocket.

The gauchos held out their hands with a movement of joy, and instantly pocketed the gold.

"Only, understand that a month begun must finish, and that when you wish to quit the service of this *caballero*, you must give him eight days' notice."

"We accept them."

"Swear then to keep them faithfully."

The two bandits opened their ponchos, took in their hands the scapularies hanging at their necks, and, taking off their hats, and raising their eyes to heaven with an emotion worthy a more Christian oath—

"We swear on these blessed scapularies to keep the conditions accepted by us," said they, both together; "may we lose the portion we hope for in paradise, and be damned, if we fail in the oath we freely give."

"Very good," said Tyro; and turning towards the Indian, while the gauchos, after dropping their scapularies, put them in their breasts again—"And you, Neno, will you remain in the service of your master?"

"That would be impossible," boldly answered the Indian; "I have another master"

"Very good; you are free. Go."

Neno did not require the request to be repeated. After bowing to the painter, he leaped lightly out of the boat, and proceeded hastily towards San Miguel.

The guaranis followed him a minute with his eyes; then, leaning towards Sacatripas, he whispered a word into his ear.

The bandit made an affirmative gesture with his head, gently touched his brother's arm, and both, rapidly landing, set off running, and disappeared in the darkness.

"These demons will be very valuable to you, master."

"I believe so, but they appear to me atrocious scoundrels."

The guaranis smiled, without answering.

"Do you not consider the conduct of this Neno shabby, after so many kindnesses that I have done him?" pursued the painter.

"You do not know all that he has done, master."

"What do you mean?"

"It is he who has betrayed you."

"You knew that!" cried the young man, with violence, "and you have brought this wretch with us?"

"Listen, master," coldly answered the guaranis.

At this moment a cry of agony pierced the air. Although far off, it had such an expression of anguish and of grief that the painter involuntarily trembled, and felt himself covered with a cold perspiration.

"Oh!" cried he; "it is the cry of a man who is being murdered. What is happening? *Mon Dieu!*"

And he made a movement to jump out of the barque.

"Stop, master," said Tyro, "it is useless."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, master, that your gauchos have commenced their services; you see that they are valuable men. Go and rejoin the ladies, while I conceal the boat."

The young man rose, without answering, and quitted the boat, staggering like a drunken man.

"It is frightful!" murmured he; "and yet, perhaps, the death of this wretch may save the life of three persons."

He proceeded to the gallery and rejoined the ladies, who were trembling close to each other, not understanding the prolonged absence of the young man.

The sight of the Frenchman re-assured them.

"What shall we do now?" asked the marchioness, in a low voice.

"In a few minutes we shall know," answered Emile; "we must wait."

At this moment the guaranis appeared, followed by Mataseis.

"I have sunk the barque," said the Indian, "in order to destroy the traces of our journey. The brother of this senor has gone out as a scout; come."

They followed him.

The Indian proceeded in the darkness with as much ease as in full daylight. The fugitives were soon sufficiently near, for the sound of several voices reached them.

Tyro twice imitated the sound of an owl. A profound silence immediately reigned in the cavern; then a man appeared, holding in one hand a lantern, and in the other a loaded pistol.

This man was Don Santiago Pincheyra.

"Who goes there?" asked he, in a threatening tone.

"A friend," answered the painter.

"Ah! ah! your expedition has succeeded, it appears?" answered the Montonero. "So much the better; I began to be uneasy at your long absence."

They entered the cavern, in which were a dozen Montoneros.

With a delicacy which, in such a man, would not have been suspected, the Montonero approached the two ladies, whom, notwithstanding their costume, he had discovered, and, bowing to them as he presented them with silk neckerchiefs—

"Cover your faces, ladies," said he respectfully. "It will be better for no one to know who you are. At a later time you would not, perhaps, be much pleased to be recognised by one of the companions whom fate gives you to-day."

"Thank you, senor; you are really a *caballero*," graciously answered the marchioness.

This happy thought of the Montonero preserved the *incognito* of the fugitives.

"As to us," continued he, addressing the painter, "we are men capable of answering for our acts."

"It is of little consequence for us to be recognised," answered the latter; "is everything ready?"

"Everything is ready; I have a numerous troop of bold companions concealed like *guanacas* in the thicket. We will leave when you like."

"Well, I think the sooner the better."

"Oh! then nothing prevents us; let me just give a look out, and I will tell you when it is time to rejoin me."

And after having with a gesture ordered his companions to follow him, the Montonero disappeared in the gallery.

There only remained in the cavern the two ladies, the painter, and the guaranis.

"My good Tyro," then said Emile, "I do not know how to acknowledge your devotion; you are not one of those men whom one pays, but, before separating, I should wish to give you a proof of——"

"Pardon, master," interrupted Tyro. "You spoke of separating?"

"Yes, my friend, and believe me, that this causes me real sorrow."

"You are then discontented with my services, master? If it is so, excuse me, I shall try for the future better to understand your intentions."

"What!" cried the young man, with a joyful surprise, "you intend to follow me, notwithstanding the dangers which surround us?"

"These dangers would themselves be an additional reason for me not to leave you, master," he answered. "Although I may be but a poor Indian, nevertheless, there are certain occasions when one is happy to know that there is a devoted heart available."

"Tyro," said the Frenchman, profoundly touched with the simple and sincere affection of this man, "you are no longer my servant, you are my friend."

"Thank you, oh! thank you," answered he, kissing his hand; "then you agree that I shall accompany you?"

"*Pardieu!*" cried he, "it is now between us for life."

"And you will speak to me as before."

"I will speak to you as you wish; are you content?"

"Thank you once more, master. Oh! make your mind easy; you shall never repent your kindness."

They then went to the gallery; the horses of the young man were not in the stable, which had been assigned to them, but he did not disquiet himself on that account.

They soon came out into the midst of the underwood, where, the night before, the Spaniards and the patriots had waged battle. A numerous troop of horsemen was stationed silent before the cavern.

The guaranis had taken precautions; when the Montonero came out into the open air, he immediately found the gaucho, holding several horses by the bridle.

"Here are your horses, ladies," said he.

The marchioness thanked him. The Indian fastened behind the horses the valises that she had given him, and then assisted the mother and the daughter to place themselves in the saddles.

Emile, the Montonero, and the gaucho were already mounted.

At the moment when the guaranis put his feet in the stirrups, a sharp whistle was heard in the woods.

"There is our scout," said he.

Sacatripas, indeed, almost immediately appeared.

The gaucho appeared to have been running rapidly.

"Let us go, let us go!" said he, in a sad voice; "if we do not want to be smoked out like wolves. In less than half an hour they will be here."

"The devil!" cried the Montonero; "that is bad news, companion; but let us away."

The horsemen applied the spurs as they loosed their bridles, and all the troop darted forward in the darkness with the rapidity of a hurricane.

The two ladies were placed between Emile and the guaranis, who were themselves each flanked by a gaucho. There was something strange and fantastic in the mad course of this black legion, flying in the darkness, silent and sad, with the irresistible rapidity of a whirlwind.

The flight continued thus for several hours; the horses gasped; and some even began to stumble.

"Whatever happens, we must stop an hour," murmured the Pincheyra.

"Let us only reach the rancho of the Quemado" said Tyro.

"What good will that be?" sharply replied the Montonero; "we still are two leagues from it at least; our horses will be completely knocked up."

"What matter? I have prepared a relay."

"A relay! We are too numerous."

"Two hundred horses await us."

"Two hundred horses! Your master is very rich."

"He?" said the Indian, laughing, "he is as poor as Job. But," added he, significantly, "his companions are rich."

"Then," cried the Montonero, with feverish emotion, "ahead! ahead! companions."

The journey was continued with feverish rapidity.

A little before sunrise they reached the rancho. It was time they did so; the horses were only kept up by the bridle; they stumbled at each step.

Their masters, with that careless philosophy which characterises the gauchos, after having relieved them of their saddles, abandoned the horses, and followed the cavalcade as well as they could by running.

The rancho of the Quemado was in some respects but a vast shed.

Each man soon caught the horse which he wanted, and proceeded to harness it.

There remained eighty or one hundred horses in the enclosure.

"We must not leave these horses here," said the Montonero; "our enemies would make use of them."

"It is easy to avoid that," observed Tyro; "there is a *yegna madrina*, we will put a bell on her; the horses will follow her."

"*Pardieu!* you are a valuable comrade," replied the Montonero, joyously; "nothing is more easy."

The order was immediately given by him, and the spare horses were soon out o sight in the direction of the mountains, under the escort of some horsemen.

The horses, thus at liberty, could make long tracks without fatiguing themselves. This mode of relay is generally adopted in America.

"Now," resumed the Montonero, "I think we shall do well to mount horse again."

"Yes, and to set out again," added Emile.

In the first rays of the sun, which glittered on their arms, a numerous troop of horsemen was perceived coming towards them at full speed.

"*Rayo de Dios!*" cried Don Santiago; "the scout was right; we were closely followed."

They set out again.

This time the journey was not so rapid.

Once in the passes of the Cordilleras, they were saved.

The flight, however, could not but be fatiguing to the two ladies, who, accustomed to all the refinements of luxury, could only keep themselves on horseback by dint of great energy. Tyro and his master were obliged to keep constantly by their side, and watch over them attentively. Without this precaution they would have fallen from their horses.

"But who has betrayed us?" suddenly exclaimed Don Santiago.

"I know him," answered Sacatripas.

"You know him, senor? Well, then, you will do me the pleasure of telling me, will you not?"

"It is useless. The man who has betrayed you is dead; but he was killed two hours too late."

"That is unfortunate, indeed; and why too late?"

"Because he had had time to speak."

"A good many things can be said in two hours, especially when there is no interruption. And you are sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure."

"At least," philosophically replied the Montonero, "we have the consolation of being certain that he will speak no more—there is something in that. As to the men who follow us," added he.

But he suddenly checked himself, uttering a horrible oath, and bounding from his saddle.

"What is the matter?" asked Emile, with uneasiness.

"*Mil demonios!*—that these picaros are gaining on us every moment."

"Oh! oh!" quickly cried the young man; "do you think so?"

"Why, look yourself."

The painter looked; the Montonero had spoken truly. The enemy's troop was sensibly approaching.

"*Carai!* I do not know what I would give to know who are those demons."

"They are part of the squadron of Don Zeno Cabral."

"So much the better!" said the Montonero, with rage; "I shall perhaps have my revenge."

"Do you intend to fight these people?"

"Do you think that I will allow myself to be shot?"

"I do not say that; but it appears to me that we can redouble our pace."

"What good will that be? Do you not see that these fellows have with them a fresh *recua*, and that they will still overtake us?"

"As affairs stand, I believe, with you, that that will be the best," said Emile.

"Good!" answered Don Santiago, "you are a man!"

Then, without any one foreseeing what was his intention, he made his horse suddenly dart off, and dashed at full speed to the front of the patriots.

"Tyro," then said Emile, addressing the guaranis, "take with you the two brothers, and put the marchioness and her daughter in safety."

"Senor, why separate us?" asked the marchioness, with a sorrowrul air; "would it not be better for us to remain near you?"

"Pardon me for insisting on this tem porary separation, madame. I have sworn to do all I can to save you, and I will keep my word."

The marchioness only answered by a sigh.

"You will not abandon these ladies under any pretext," continued the young man, addressing the Indian; "and if misfortune happen to me during the combat, you will continue to serve them. May I reckon on you?"

"As on yourself master."

"Advance then! and God protect you."

On a sign from the Indian the gauchos took by the bridle the horses of the two ladies, and set off at a gallop.

The painter who, as they galloped, followed them with his eyes, saw them disappear in the midst of a thick cluster of trees.

"Thank God! Conquerors or conquered, they will not fall into the hands of their persecutors," said he.

Suddenly, several shots afar off were heard. Emile looked round and perceived Don Santiago, who was returning at full speed towards his troop, brandishing his carbine above his head.

Three or four horsemen were in hot pursuit of him.

Arrived at a certain distance the Spaniard stopped, shouldered his carbine and fired, and then started off again at a gallop.

A horseman fell; the others retreated.

The Spaniard soon found himself again in the midst of his own people.

"Halt!" cried he, with a voice of thunder.

The troop immediately stopped.

"Companions, loyal subjects of the king," continued he; "I have reconnoitred these ladrones; they are scarcely forty. Advance!"

"Forward!" repeated the troop, rushing forward with him.

Emile charged with the others—with rather a sullen air, it is true; he cared as little for the king as for the country, and it appeared to him wiser to have made their escape as rapidly as possible.

Notwithstanding their small number, the patriots did not appear at all intimidated.

The shock was terrible; the two troops resolutely attacked each other with their swords, and soon found themselves mingled together.

In the *melée* Emile recog nised Don Zeno Cabral. He darted towards him, and, striking with the chest of his horse that of his adversary, fatigued with a long journey, the latter was overthrown.

Leaping immediately to the ground, the young man immediately put his knee to the chest of Don Zeno.

"Death! dea h!" cried Don Santiago, who now came up.

"Let the fight cease," answered Emile, turning towards him; "this gentleman

has surrendered, on condition that he shall be free to return to San Miguel with his companions.

"Who has authorised you to make conditions?" said the Montonero.

"The service I have rendered you, and the promise you have made me."

The Spaniard suppressed a gesture of rage.

"Well," answered he, after a pause; "you wish it; let it be so, but you will repent of it. Retreat!"

"You are free," said the young man, holding out his hand to Don Zeno.

The latter darted a fierce glance at him.

"I am obliged to accept your offer," said he, "but all is not finished between us. We shall see one another again."

"I hope so," simply answered the young man; and, remounting his horse, he rejoined his companions, already a good way off.

CHAPTER XI.

EL RINCON DEL BOSQUECILLO.

It was about the middle of summer. The heat had been suffocating all day near the llano de Manso. At some distance was a small stream nearly dried up. On an elevated bank there was a thick wood, a kind of oasis planted by the hands of God. Black swans drifted down the stream, crocodiles wallowed in the mire; partridges and turtle-doves flew to the shelter of the trees. Everything seemed as it came from the hands of the Creator.

But it was not so; the llano de Manso is in some respects a neutral territory, where the tribes rendezvous to feast, and where they for a time forget their hatred and rivalry.

The whites have but rarely, and at long intervals, penetrated into this country, and always with some apprehension; so much the more, as the Indians, continually beaten back by civilisation—feeling the importance of preserving this territory for themselves—defended its approaches with unspeakable fury, torturing and massacring without pity the whites whom curiosity or ill-fortune brought into this region.

The sun was rapidly setting on the horizon, considerably lengthening the shadow of the rocks, bushes, and a few trees here and there scattered in the llano. The panthers already commenced to utter their hoarse and mournful growlings as they sought their drinking-places; the jaguars bounded out of their dens with dull cries of anger, lashing with their powerful tails their panting sides; troops of wild oxen and horses fled frightened before these dreadful kings of the night, whom the first hours of evening rendered masters of the desert.

At the moment when the sun, having reached the level of the horizon, was drowned, so to say, in waves of purple and gold, a troop of horsemen appeared on the right bank of the Rio Vermejo, proceeding apparently towards the bank of which we have spoken.

These horsemen were Indian Guaycurus.

They formed a troop of about fifty men, all armed as warriors, and not having any tuft of ostrich feathers or streamers at the point of their lances—which showed that they were on some important expedition.

A little in advance of the troop were two men, chiefs, as was shown by the vulture's feather placed in their red bands.

They wore variegated ponchos, trousers of brown holland, and boots made of leather from horse's legs. Their arms—*laco* bolas, lance and knives—were the same as those of their companions; but here the resemblance stopped.

The first was a young man of twenty-two at the most. His figure was tall, elegant, supple, and well-formed; his manners noble, his least gesture graceful. No painting, no tattooing, disfigured his expressive features, of almost feminine beauty, but to which—an extraordinary thing in an Indian—a black beard, short and frizzled, gave a masculine and decided expression. This beard, added to the dull white of the skin of the young man, would have made him pass easily for a white man, if he had worn a European costume.

The young man was the principal chief of the warriors by whom he was at this moment followed. He was named Gueyma, and enjoyed a great reputation in his tribe for wisdom and bravery.

His companion as far as it was possible—in spite of his upright figure, his hair black as the raven's wing, and his countenance free from wrinkles—to fix his age with any certainty, was about seventy. However, as we have said, no sign of decrepitude was observable in him; his eye shone with all the fire of youth, his limbs were supple and vigorous; his teeth, of which not one was missing, were brilliantly white, rendered more striking by the dark hue of his complexion, although, like the other chief, he had neither tattoo nor painting; but, in default of physical signs of old age, the expression of severity on his fine and intelligent countenance, his emphatic gestures, and the measured slowness with which he let fall the least word, would have proved to every man accustomed to the Indians that this chief was very aged.

In the centre of the troop were two men whom it was easy to recognise as Europeans.

These men, though they were without arms, appeared to be treated, if not as completely free, at least with a certain consideration.

They were two young men of twenty-five or twenty-eight, dressed in the costume of Brazilian officers, with fine bold features, and careless and hearty expression. They galloped in the midst of the Indian warriors without appearing to concern themselves in any way as to the place whither they were being conducted, and talked gaily.

The sun had set below the horizon, and perfect darkness had almost immediately replaced the light of day, at the moment when the Indians were ascending at a gallop the scarcely-traced path which led to the summit of the bank, and gave access to the wood.

Arrived in the middle of a glade—from which sprang a stream of water, clear and limpid, which, after a tortuous course through the rocks, fell in the form of a splendid cascade into the Rio Vermejo, from a height of forty or fifty feet—the young Gueyma chief stopped his horse, leaped from his saddle, and ordered his warriors to instal themselves in a camp for the night.

The latter obeyed; they immediately alighted, and quickly occupied themselves with securing the horses, giving them provender, lighting the watch-fires, and in preparing the repast for the evening.

Some five or six warriors alone preserved their arms.

The two Brazilian officers, no doubt fatigued with the long journey during the great heat of the day, had, with a sigh of relief, heard the order of the chief, and had obeyed it with speed.

Twenty minutes later the fires were lighted, a covering constructed to shelter the whites against the abundant dew of the morning, and the warriors, clustered in little

groups of four or five, ate with a good appetite the simple provisions placed before them—consisting for the most part of yams, baked under ashes, of the meal of manioc, and of meat dried in the sun, and roasted over the fire.

The chiefs had, through a warrior, invited the Brazilian officers to take part in the meal—a courteous invitation that the latter had accepted with so much the more pleasure as, with the exception of gourds full of sugar-cane brandy, which they carried at their saddles, they were completely without provisions.

The officers, after a ceremonious bow, seated themselves on the grass, and attacked the provisions set before them, at first with a certain forbearance which politeness demanded; but they soon gave way to the most imperious demands of their appetites.

"Epoi!" said the old chief, "I am happy, gentlemen, to see you so much enjoy so poor a meal."

"Upon my word," answered one of the officers, "it comes at a time when we cannot disdain it."

"Hum!" said the second, "it is just twenty-four hours since we have eaten."

"Why did you not say that before?" resumed the chief.

"A thousand thanks for your kindness, chief; but it did not suit our dignity to make such a request."

"The whites have strange scruples," murmured Gueyma, speaking rather to himself than to the officers.

However, they heard the remark, to which one of them replied—

"It is not a question of delicacy, chief, but an innate feeling of propriety amongst men who respect themselves."

"You will excuse us senor, pursued Gueyma, "we Indians, almost savages, as you call us, know nothing of those subtle distinctions; the life of the desert does not teach such things."

"And we are, perhaps, only the more happy that it is so," added the old chief.

"Possibly," answered the officer. "Let us quit this subject, and allow me to offer you a mouthful of brandy."

And, after having uncorked his gourd, he presented it to the chief.

The latter, pushing away the gourd, looked in astonishment at the officer.

"You refuse me?" asked the latter; "for what motive, chief?"

The Indian several times shook his head.

"My son is not accustomed to be in the company of the Guaycurus," said he.

"Why this question, chief?"

"Because," answered he, "if it were otherwise, the young pale chief would know that the Guaycurus warriors never drink that liquid which the whites name ardent spirits, and which makes them stupid."

"Excuse my ignorance, chief; I had no intention of offending you."

"Where there is no intention," answered the old chief, smiling, "an injury cannot exist."

"Well spoken, my master," gaily pursued the young man.

"First," said one of the officers, when the meal was concluded, "let me tell you, that since chance has brought me among you, I am a prey to continual astonishment."

"*Epoi!*" said the chief, smiling; "indeed!"

"Upon my word, yes. I had never seen an Indian. At Rio de Janeiro, when they spoke to me of the red-skins, they were represented as savage, fierce, faithless—entirely sunk in the most horrible barbarism."

"Ah, ah! and what does the pale-face now see?"

"Why, I see men brave, intelligent—enjoying a civilisation different to ours, it is true, but which is civilisation, nevertheless—chiefs like you and your companion for

example, speaking the Portuguese language as well as myself. That is what I have seen among you up to the present time, chief, without taking account of the white complexion of your companion, which, added to his features, gives him rather the appearance of a European.

The two chiefs smiled, and the elder resumed, with an expression of pride—

"The Guaycurus are descendants of the great Tupinambas, the ancient possessors of Brazil, before the whites had robbed them of their territory. They are called by the pale-faces themselves *cavalheiros*.

"So," said the officer, "the Guaycurus are the most civilised among the Indians?"

"The only civilised," answered the chief, with pride

"I admit it, chief; but that does not explain to me how it is that you speak our language with perfection."

"The Congonar has lived many years," answered he; "the snows of many a great winter have fallen on his head since he saw the light. The Congonar was a warrior before the pale-face was born. At that time the chief visited the great villages of the whites; for several moons he even lived amongst them. The whites taught the Congonar their language. Has my son any other questions to ask him?"

"No, chief; I thank you sincerely for the frank and friendly way in which you have been pleased to answer me. I am the more delighted, as this sympathy cannot but be very conducive to the satisfactory termination of the business we have in hand."

"I hope it may be so."

"And I also, with all my heart. Are we still far distant from the place where the interview is to take place?"

"Then let my son rejoice, for we have reached the spot assigned by the Guaycurus captains to the chiefs of the pale-faces."

"What! we have already reached the place called by the Spaniards the Rincon del Bosquecillo?"

"It is here."

"Thank God, for the general will not be long before he comes here, as we have already come; and now, chief, accept again my thanks. I am going, with your permission, to take a few hours' repose."

"Let my sons sleep; sleep is good for young men," answered the chief, with a benevolent smile.

The officers immediately withdrew under the awning prepared for them, and were not long before they slept.

The chiefs remained, facing each other.

The Guaycurus warriors, stretched before the fires, slept, enveloped in their ponchos.

The Congonar looked for a moment pensively at his companion.

"Of what is Gueyma thinking at this moment?" said he, in a gentle voice; "is he communing with his heart? Do his thoughts recall the pleasant memory of Dove's Eye, the maid with the blue eyes? or is his mind occupied with to-morrow?"

The young man started, raised his head, and, fixing an uncertain, flashing look upon the old chief, who looked at him with sadness—

"No," answered he, in a low voice, somewhat trembling with emotion, "my father has not seen clearly into the heart of his son; the memory of Dove's Eye is always present to the thought of Gueyma; there is no need for it to be evoked to appear. The result of the council of to-morrow is of little consequence to the young chief; his mind is seeking for his father."

The face of the old chief suddenly clouded.

"This thought still torments my son?"

"Always!" said the young man, with animation, "until the Congonar has fulfilled his promise."

"What is this promise that my son reminds me of?"

"That of telling me the name of my father—how it is that from a child I have never seen him."

"Yes, it is true," answered the Congonar, "I have made this promise; but you in return made me one."

"Yes; let my father pardon me, I remember it; but my father is good; he will be indulgent towards a young man."

"My son is not only one of the bravest warriors of his tribe, but he is also one of its most renowned chiefs; he owes to all the example of patience. Another moon shall not pass without my revealing to him the secret that he is so anxious to learn."

After having pronounced these words in a severe voice, mingled with affection, the old chief enveloped himself in his poncho, stretched himself on the ground, and closed his eyes.

Gueyma looked at him a moment with a strange mixture of anger, respect, and depression, and then he gave a deep sigh, allowed his head to fall on his breast, and fell into a reverie of bitter reflections.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TREATY.

About half-past four in the morning, the darkness by degrees paled before the first rays of the sun; the sky was covered with broad streaks of changing colour.

The Indians are not generally heavy sleepers; so the sun had scarcely appeared above the horizon than they all awoke and proceeded to dress, washing themselves every day; for the Guaycurus, contrary to other American tribes, number among their characteristics that of strict cleanliness.

At the voice of Congonar, they united in a semicircle, their eyes turned towards the rising sun, and addressed a fervent prayer to the radiant orb of day.

This pious duty accomplished, the warriors arose, and immediately shared the labours of the camp.

Some led the horses to water; others rubbed them down carefully; some went to cut wood, in order to rekindle the smouldering fires, whilst some five or six chosen warriors, leaping on their bare-backed horses, started off into the savannah, to procure by hunting the necessary provisions for their breakfast.

In a few minutes the camp offered a most animated picture; for just as the Indians are idle and careless when their wives, to whom they abandon all the domestic work, are with them, so they are active and alert in their war expeditions.

The Brazilian officers, awakened by the noise and movements which were being made around them, came out from the canopy under which they had passed the night, and proceeded gaily to mix among the groups of Indians.

The Guaycurus received them in the most cordial way, laughing and talking with them, affably inquiring if they had well slept, and if they were completely recovered from their fatigue of the previous day.

Soon all was in order in the camp; the horses which had been led to water were again attached to piquets, with a good supply of fresh grass; the huntsmen returned loaded with game; and the morning meal, prepared in all haste, was soon served to the guests on large banana and palm leaves.

Immediately after breakfast, the Congonar dispatched several scouts in different directions.

"Your friends are late in arriving," said he to the Brazilian officers; "perhaps something has occurred to hinder them."

The officers bowed as a sign of assent; they had nothing to reply to this observation.

Several hours thus passed. The Guaycurus warriors talked among themselves, smoked, or fished from the banks of the Rio Vermejo; but no Indian wandered far from the camp, in the midst of which was raised, as a standard, the long lance of Gueyma planted in the ground, and having floating at its summit a white banner made with a handkerchief borrowed from the officers.

About eleven in the morning the sentinels signalled the appearance of two troops coming from two opposite directions, but both riding towards the camp.

The Guaycurus chief dispatched two warriors towards these troops.

The latter returned in a very few minutes.

They had recognised the strangers. The first were Macobis, and the others Trentones.

But almost immediately appeared a third troop, then a fourth, then a fifth, and at last a sixth.

Scouts were immediately dispatched to meet them, and they were not long in returning, announcing that they were detachments of Chiriguanos, Langoas, Abipones, and Payagoas.

"Epoi," answered the Congonar; "the warriors will camp at the foot of the hill."

The scouts then set off at full speed, and proceeded to communicate to the captains of the different detachments the orders of their chief.

Arrived at a certain distance from the bank, on the summit of which the camp of the Guaycurus was established, the Indian detachments stopped, uttered their war-cry with a resounding voice, and, after having executed certain evolutions, making their horses caracole, they proceeded to establish themselves at the points which had been assigned to them.

The chiefs of their detachments, followed each by two warriors more particularly attached to their persons, ascended the hill at a gallop and entered the camp, where they were received in the most cordial way by the Guaycurus chiefs.

After a rather long interchange of compliments, in which all the minute exigencies of Indian etiquette were studied, the chiefs proceeded together towards the council-fire, where all sat down.

There was then perfect silence in the assembly. The slaves gave to each some tobacco rolled in palm leaves, and sent round the maté.

When the cup had passed from hand to hand, and when the last puff of smoke had been drawn from the rolls of tobacco, Gueyma made a gesture with his hand—

"Allied captains of the powerful and invincible tribe of the Guaycurus," he said, "I am happy to see you here, and at the readiness you have shown in coming at the invitation of the members of the supreme council of our tribe. The reason for this extraordinary assembly is extremely important; you will soon learn it."

A Payagoa chief, aged and of respectable aspect, bowed and answered—

"Captain of the Guaycurus, although still very young, you unite in yourself the prudent circumspection of the agouti with the fervid courage of the jaguar. The words that you utter are inspired by the Great Spirit. In the name of the captains

here present, I thank you for the latitude you give us in leaving to us entire freedom as to our determinations."

The other chiefs bowed, and each in his turn, with his hand placed on his heart, pronounced these words—

"Emavidi Chaime, the great captain of the Payagoas, has spoken as a prudent man: wisdom is in him."

At this moment one of the sentinels signalled the approach of a numerous troop.

"Here are those with whom we shall now confer," said Gueyma. "To horse, brothers! and let us go to meet them, to do them honour."

The captains immediately rose and mounted their horses.

Gueyma and the Congonar put themselves at their head: the troop, composed of some fifteen chiefs, all chosen horsemen and warriors, renowned in their tribes, rode like a hurricane from the top to the bottom of the hill, and darted at full speed through the plain, raising in its passage thick clouds of greyish dust.

Meanwhile the new-comers rapidly approached.

The troop was composed but of ten horsemen, of whom two were Indians, and appeared to act as guides to those who followed them.

The latter were whites—Brazilians—as was easy to discover by their costume.

He who rode at the head of the little troop was a man of some fifty years. With noble and haughty features, and refined and elegant manners, he wore the rich gold-embroidered uniform of a general. Although he sat upright and firmly on his horse, and his full black eye seemed to flash with all the fire of youth, nevertheless, his greyish hair, and the deep wrinkles of his forehead, added to the carewcrn and pensive expression of his countenance, gave proof of a life which had been much tried.

The horseman who was at his side wore the costume of a captain, and the insignia of an aide-de-camp; he was about twenty-three or twenty-four. He had a proud eye and noble and regular features.

The six other horsemen were dressed in the costume of soldiers of the conquista; one of the two bore the insignia of a sub-officer.

As to the Indians, who probably acted as guides to the troop, they did not carry any apparent arms, but by their dress and by the feather planted in the bright red band which circled their forehead, it was easy to recognise them as Guaycurus chiefs.

Both—warriors of a certain age, and of sombre and reserved appearance—galloped silently side by side, their eyes obstinately fixed in front, and not appearing in any way to occupy themselves with the Brazilians.

As they rode, the two officers talked with a freedom which, considering the difference of grade, showed a certain intimacy between them.

"Here we are at last, arrived at the Bosquecillo," said the captain, "and this river is the Rio Vermejo, which we have been obliged twice to cross. Upon my word—saving the respect that I owe you, general—I am happy to see at last this mysterious territory."

"Hush! Don Paulo," answered the general, "do not speak so loud; our guides can hear you."

"Bah! Do you think so, general? At this distance?"

"I know the sharpness of ear of these fellows."

"I will follow your counsel, general—especially as, according to what you tell me, you have had some experience of these Indians."

"Yes," answered the general, "I had something to do with them on a terrible occasion; and although long years have flown since then, the memory of it is always present to my thoughts. But let us quit that subject and speak of the occasion which brings us to-day in these parts. I do not conceal from you, my

friend, that, honourable as may be the mission which has been confided to me, I consider it extremely difficult."

"Is that really your opinion, general?"

"Certainly. I should not wish to speak diplomatically with you."

"Do you fear treachery?"

"Who knows? however, as far as I know, I feel assured that all will be done honourably."

"Hum! Do you know, general, that our friends would be in a terrible position if the fancy seized the Indians to violate the right of nations? For it appears to me that if our guides should have the desire to leave us in the lurch, nothing would be more easy for them, and then what hostages would answer for the lives of our companions?"

"What you say is very true; unhappily, I have not been able to take any other measures. Moreover, one thing re-assures me; it is, that if they had the intention of betraying us, they would not have waited until this moment to do so."

"That is true; and in fact, if I am not deceived, here we are at the rendezvous."

"Or at least we shall arrive there before half-an-hour."

"Our guides have, without doubt, perceived something now, general; for you see they have stopped."

"Let us rejoin them, then, as soon as possible," answered the general.

The two Indians had indeed stopped to await the Brazilians.

"Well, captains," said the general to them, in a cheerful voice, "what has happened that you stop thus?"

"My brother and I have stopped," sententiously replied the elder of the two chiefs, "because the captains come to meet the pale-faces."

"We have, then, just reached the place?"

"Look," pursued the chief, stretching out his arms towards the hill.

"Ah! ah! So I was not deceived; this hill is indeed the Rincon del Bosquecillo?"

"That is the name which the pale-faces call it."

"Very well, I am charmed to know it with certainty. You say, then, chief, that the captains are coming?"

"You see that dust?" resumed the Indian; "it is raised by the hasty feet of the captains' horses."

"If it is so, captain, I shall be obliged to you, captain, to inform me what I ought to do."

"Nothing, but wait."

"That is what I will do with pleasure. By the way, I avail myself of the opportunity of thanking you personally, captain, for the honour with which your companion and you have guided us hitherto."

"We have only accomplished our duty."

"Captain, honour compels me to acknowledge the loyalty with which you have acquitted yourselves."

"Tarou Niom and his brother I-me-oh-eh are Guaycurus captains; treachery is unknown to them."

At the first name pronounced by the Indian chief the general had imperceptibly started.

"The name of my father is Tarou Niom?" he asked.

"Yes," laconically answered the Indian; and he added, after a short pause, "these are the captains."

In fact, almost immediately the tall grass appeared to divide, and the Indians appeared.

"The pale-faces are welcome on the hunting-grounds of the Guaycurus," said

Gueyma, after he had gracefully bowed to the general; "the warriors of my tribe and of the allied tribes are happy to see them."

"I thank the captains for their kind words," answered the general. "I am ready to follow the captains to the place whither they please to conduct me."

After a few more words, the two troops, blended into one, resumed the direction of the hill.

A few minutes afterwards the Brazilian officers, escorted by the Indian chiefs, reached the summit of the hill, where they were received with marks of lively joy.

As soon as they had reached the camp, Gueyma stopped his horse, and, placing his right hand on the shoulder of one of the two officers, who had come forward to meet the new-comers, he turned towards the general—

"Here are the two hostages; these men have been treated by us as brothers."

"Indeed," answered immediately one of the two officers, "we hasten to state that we have only to praise the conduct pursued towards us."

"I think," said the general, "that the two Guaycurus captains confided to our keeping, to answer for the safety of our hostages, have not had to complain."

"The pale-faces have acted honourably towards the Guaycurus warriors," answered Tarou Niom.

After some few words the Brazilians were ceremoniously conducted before the council-fire.

The general took his seat, having his officers at his side, while the soldiers silently ranged themselves behind.

The Guaycurus chiefs and the captains of the other allied nations crouched on their heels in the Indian fashion, in face of the whites, from whom they were only separated by the fire.

"We beg," said Gueyma, "the great captain of the pale-faces to repeat, as it has been agreed before the captains of the allied tribes, the propositions that he addressed to us on the Salto Grande, where we met at his request. These propositions communicated by us to the allied captains, have been, I ought to state, well received by them; however, before engaging themselves definitely, and contracting an offensive alliance with the pale-faces here assembled, against other men of the same colour, the captains wish to be assured that these conditions will be strictly and honourably executed by the whites, and that the red warriors will not afterwards have to repent having opened a complacent ear to perfidious counsels. Let my father speak then; the chiefs will hear him with great attention."

The general bowed, and after having looked attentively on the crowd which, so to speak, hung upon his lips, he rose, leant carelessly on the handle of his sabre, and commenced in Portuguese—a language that the greater part of the chiefs spoke with ease, and which they all understood.

"Captains of the great allied tribes," said the general, impressively, "your white grandfather, the powerful monarch that I have the honour to represent, has heard your complaints; the tale of your misfortunes has moved his heart, always good and compassionate, and he has resolved to put an end to the disgraceful vexations of which, for so many years, the Spaniards have made you the victims."

A murmur of pleasure received this first part of the general's discourse.

"The Spaniards," pursued he, "not content with oppressing you, have traitorously seized on large, rich, and fertile territories, belonging to that powerful monarch, my master. These territories he means to recover. Since the perfidious Spaniards continually break the treaties concluded with them, my sovereign, seizing the opportunity which presents itself, to render you that justice to which, as his children, you have a right, takes your cause in hand. He engages that the hunting-grounds which have been so unjustly taken from you shall be restored. But it is just, captains, that you should show yourselves grateful. This is what, through me, the

powerful sovereign whom I represent demands of you: you shall arm your chosen warriors, of whom you shall form detachments of horsemen under the orders of experienced captains. These detachments shall abandon the llano de Manso—or, as you call your territory, the valley of Japizlaga; at a signal given by us, and from several points at the same time, they will invade the provinces of Tucuman and Cordova, so as to effect their junction with the Indians of the Pampas, and to harass the Spaniards. The war ended, all the promises made through this guipos," added he, throwing into the midst of the assembly a stick split half-way up, and garnished with cords of several colours in the form of chaplets, having seeds, shells, and flints strung upon it, and separated by knots tied in various ways, "shall be strictly kept. Now I have given my guipos, thirty mules, loaded with lassos, bolas, ponchos, fressadas, bits for the horses, knives, &c., wait at the entrance of the llano, under the care of some soldiers. If you please, you can share among yourselves the treasures that the king, my master, deigns to present to you. On my return, if my propositions are accepted, I will give the order that all shall be given to you."

Warm applause followed the general's speech, and he sat down again with the most unequivocal manifestations of sympathy.

The Indian captains commenced to converse among themselves, although in a low voice, and in a language incomprehensible to the Europeans.

We will here draw the reader's attention to a peculiarity that we have only met with in these regions, and especially among the Guaycurus.

The men and the women have a language which presents striking differences; moreover, when they discuss diplomatic questions before the envoys of a foreign nation—as occurred at the present time—they produce by the contraction of the lips a hissing which has received among them certain recognised modifications, and which has thus become a distinct language.

Nothing is more curious than to be present at a serious deliberation, hissed in this way by the orators, with modulations and graces, which are really remarkable, and which produce a strange and mysterious effect.

The general, meanwhile, talked in a low voice with his officers, sipping his maté, while the captains in turn discussed his propositions, as he conjectured, at least; for it was impossible for him to understand anything, or even to seize a single word in the midst of this continual hissing and chirping.

At last Gueyma rose, and after having claimed silence by a majestic gesture, he replied to the general in Portuguese—

"The captains," said he, "have listened to the words of the grand captain of the pale-faces with all the attention they deserve; they have considered attentively the propositions which he has been charged to make to them. These propositions the captains find just and equitable; they accept them, begging the captain of the pale-faces to thank their white grandfather, and to assure him of the respect and devotion of his children of the desert. From the twelfth sun after to-day the war detachments of the allied tribes will be ready, at the first signal, to invade the enemy's frontiers. I have said it; there is my guipos."

After these words he sat down, and threw in his guipos—a movement which was imitated by the other chiefs.

The general thanked the council, requested his aide-de-camp to gather up the guipos; and the treaty was thus concluded.

An hour later the Brazilians, to whom the hostages had been given up, left the Rincon del Bosquecillo in company with a detachment of chosen warriors, and again took the road to the plantations, after having decided, with Gueyma, Tarou Niom, and the principal captains, upon supplementary measures for the success of the projected invasion, and upon the means to be employed for the Brazilians and the Indians, under all circumstances, to communicate with each other.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONGONAR.

About a month had passed since the conclusion of the treaty between the Brazilians, the Guaycurus, and their allies of the Rincon del Bosquecillo. At the foot of a steep mountain, surrounded by ridges and ravines, the rugged soil of which was covered with a thick forest of oaks, a numerous troop of horsemen was camped at the entrance of a canon—the dry bed of a torrent—the soil of which was covered with stones rounded and smoothed by the action of the water, which was at this moment exhausted.

This troop, composed of some 250 or 300 men at the most, wore the characteristic costume of Guaycurus Indians.

It was evening. The camp, firmly established and watched over by active sentinels, was, by its position, completely sheltered from attack.

The warriors were sleeping, lying before the fires, enveloped in their ponchos, their arms placed within reach of their hands, so as to be ready to make use of them at the least alarm.

A little behind the camp, on the flank of the mountain, the horses were feeding on the grass, and the young shoots of trees, carefully tended by six Indians, well armed.

Two men, seated before a half-extinguished fire, having each a carbine placed near him on the grass, were talking and smoking, and every now and then sipping their maté.

These two men were Gueyma and the Congonar; the troop was placed under their immediate orders. It was composed of the youngest, the most vigorous, and most renowned warriors of the tribe.

From the time when, at the signal given by the Brazilian government, this troop had crossed the Spanish frontier, and had—like a flight of birds of prey—fallen on the enemy's territory, terror had accompanied it; murder, incendiarism, and pillage had preceded it; behind it, it had left only ruins and corpses; in its presence fear chilled the courage of the inhabitants, and made them abandon as rapidly as possible their poor ranchos, to fly from the cruelty of these barbarous Guaycurus, who spared neither women, children, nor old men, and who appeared to have taken an oath to change into a desert the rich and fertile fields, in the midst of which they traced a furrow of blood.

They had thus traversed, like a devastating hurricane, the greater part of the province, and had reached the Rio Quinto, not far from which they were camped, on the environs of a little town named Aquadita, a miserable place, the inhabitants of which had taken flight, abandoning all they possessed at the news of the approach of the Guaycurus.

Such was the horror which they possessed of these latter, that they did not consider themselves safe, even though peaceably disposed.

The treaty concluded between the Brazilians and the Indians could not have been more advantageous to the former, for this reason: from the discovery of America, the Portuguese and the Spaniards continually disputed possession of the New World. Placed side by side in Brazil and Buenos Ayres, they could not long remain without making war.

When the family of Braganza was obliged to abandon Portugal, to take refuge in Rio Janeiro, Brazil became the real centre of Portuguese power, and the king con

templated aggrandising his empire, and of adding to it what, in some respects, no reasonably considered his natural frontiers—the Banda Orientale, and the course of the Rio de la Plata.

The war lasted a long time, with alternations of success and disaster on both sides. England offered her mediation, and peace was on the point of being concluded; but, at the epoch we are dealing with, the Brazilian Portuguese, profiting by the troubles which desolated the Rio de la Plata, and especially the Banda Orientale, abruptly broke the negotiations, called out an army of 10,000 men, under the orders of General Lecor, and invaded the province—the lasting object of their covetousness—skilfully making their movements co-operate with those of the Indian bravos, with whom they were leagued, and who themselves, rushing from their deserts with the fury of wild beasts, had invaded the Spanish territory from the rear, and had thus placed them between two fires.

The picture presented at this time by the insurgent provinces was one of the saddest that could be offered as a warning to the wisdom of governors, and the good sense of peoples.

The ancient vice-royalty of Buenos Ayres, previously so rich and flourishing, had become a vast desert, its towns heaps of cinders; all its territory was but a vast battle-field, where were incessantly contending armies fighting each for its own interests, drowning patriotism in streams of blood, and replacing it by private ambition.

The Brazilian Portuguese, rendered stronger by the weakness of their enemies, had, almost without striking a blow, occupied the principal strategic points of the Banda Orientale. The gaining of two battles would render them masters of the remainder, and make this province fall into their hands.

Such was the situation of the country at the moment when we resume our narrative, which we have been obliged to interrupt, to put the reader in possession of these facts, indispensable to the understanding of those which follow.

The night was dark; the moon, veiled with clouds, shed at intervals a pale and trembling light, which impressed a stamp of sadness on the features of the landscape; the wind sighed gloomily through the branches of the trees. The two chiefs, seated side by side, were talking in a low voice, as if they feared that their companions, stretched near them, might hear their conversation. At the moment we place them on the scene, Gueyma was speaking with much animation, while his companion listened with an ironical smile.

"I repeat it, Congonar," said the young man; "we must return, and that not later than to-morrow. Do you know that we are now more than 150 leagues from Rio Vermejo?"

"I know it," coldly answered the old chief.

"Look you, my friend," pursued the young man, "you will finish by putting me in a rage."

"What would you like me to answer you?"

"How should I know? Give me an opinion—advice; tell me something, in fact. We have set out on an adventure, like a herd of wild bulls, destroying and scattering everything on our passage, and now, here we are, after a devious and aimless journey, brought to a stand at the foot of the mountains, in a country that we do not know."

"That is true," observed the Congonar.

"Observe," pursued Gueyma, with increasing animation, "that I do not address to you any reproach, my friend; but several times I have wished to retreat."

"It is true, I admit it."

"Ah! you admit it—very well."

"I have always a design, Gueyma."

"I know it, indeed, for your wisdom is great; but I should like to know this design."

"It is not yet time, my friend."

"That is always what you say, but what is to be done?"

"Still to push on in advance."

"But to go where? to do what?"

"When the moment arrives I will instruct you."

"Come, I give up any further discussion with you, Congonar. It is playing with myself to try and oppose you when you have made up your mind. Only, as I shall afterwards have to render an account of my conduct to the great chiefs, and as I do not wish to take upon myself the responsibility of the events which, no doubt, will soon transpire, I have a request to make."

"What is it, my friend?"

"It is, at break of day, to convene the council, to explain frankly to the warriors the precarious situation in which we are placed."

"You wish it, Gueyma?"

"No, my friend, I desire it."

"You shall be satisfied, my friend."

"Thank you. I see in this your habitual honour."

"In this only?" said the old man, with a sad smile.

"Congonar," resumed the young man, after a pause, "the night advances; we have nothing more to say; with your permission I will go to sleep—I am horribly fatigued; I want to get strength for to-morrow."

"Sleep, Gueyma, and may the Great Spirit give you calm repose."

"Thank you, my friend; but you—are you not going to sleep also?"

"No, I must watch; moreover, I intend to profit by the darkness to try a reconnaissance about the camp."

"Would you like me to accompany you, my friend?"

"It would be useless; sleep. I shall be equal to the task I have set myself."

"Do as you like, then, my friend."

Gueyma then carefully wrapped himself in his poncho, and some minutes afterwards was sunk in profound sleep.

The Congonar had not changed his position, crouched before the fire.

He remained thus for a considerable time—so motionless, that, from a distance, he rather resembled an idol than a man of flesh and blood.

At last, after about an hour, he gently raised his head, and looked anxiously around him.

A death-like silence pervaded the camp. The Congonar rose, tightened his girdle, seized his carbine, and proceeded slowly towards the spot where the horses were feeding.

Having reached this spot, he gave a light whistle. Almost immediately a horse came out of the group, and rubbed his head against the shoulder of the chief.

The latter, after having patted him with his hand, put a bridle on him, and, without making use of the stirrup, bounded into the saddle, after having tightened the girth, relaxed for the horse to feed more easily.

The sentinels, although they noticed the movements of the chief, did not speak, and he left the camp without any one appearing to notice it.

The warriors had for a long time been accustomed to these nocturnal absences of their chief, who, from the commencement of the expedition, set out thus nearly every night from the camp, without doubt to go on a discovery, and always remained several hours away.

The Congonar had set out from the camp slowly; he preserved the same pace while he thought he was in view of the sentinels, but as soon as a ridge of ground had concealed his movements, he loosed the bridle, gave a slight click with his tongue, and the horse immediately set off at full speed.

He galloped thus for about an hour and a half, and reached the bank of rather a broad river, whose waters, like a silver ribbon, contrasted strongly with the dark masses of the landscape.

Having reached the banks of the river, the chief threw the bridle on the neck of his horse.

The intelligent animal sniffed at the river for some time, and then boldly entered and forded it.

Immediately he was on the other bank, the horse set out again at a gallop.

The spot where the chief went to was an immense and desolate plain, where there were but ragged shrubs, and in which, here and there, were rather high hillocks of blackish sand.

It was at the foot of one of these hillocks that the chief stopped. He immediately alighted, rubbed down his horse carefully, covered him with his poncho, to prevent his chilling after the violent exercise to which he had been for so long a time subject, and, throwing the bridle on his neck, he left him free to browse.

This accomplished, the chief put his hands to his mouth, and three distinct times, at equal intervals, he imitated the cry of the screech-owl of the pampas.

Two or three minutes passed. The same cry was repeated three times at a considerable distance, and then the precipitate gallop of a horse was heard.

The chief hid himself as well as he could behind the hillock, loaded his carbine, and waited.

Soon he perceived the outline of a horseman emerging from the darkness.

Having come near, the horseman stopped short, and the cry of the screech-owl again broke upon the silence of the night.

The Congonar repeated his signal; the horseman, as if he had only waited for this answer, immediately resumed his gallop, and then a second time he stopped, and the sound of a gun being loaded was heard.

"Who goes there?" cried a firm voice in Spanish.

"A friend of the desert," answered the chief.

"What hour is it?" pursued the unknown.

"The hour of vengeance," again said the chief.

These pass-words exchanged, the two men put up their guns, and advanced towards each other with the utmost confidence.

They recognised each other.

The stranger alighted, and cordially grasped the hand which the chief held out to him.

The unknown was a white. He wore the elegant costume of the gauchos of the pampas.

"I have waited a long time for you, chief," said the stranger. "Has anything happened?"

"Nothing," replied the other; "only the camp is far off; I have been obliged, before setting out, to wait till my companion was decidedly asleep."

"He still knows nothing?"

"Is it not agreed between us?"

"Just so; but as you have the greatest confidence in him, I thought that perhaps you might tell him."

"I have not wished to do anything without informing you. I have not liked to risk taking him into confidence on so serious a matter without having in hand certain proofs of the treason of the general."

"These proofs I bring in my saddle-bags: I will give them to you. It is important for the success of our project that Gueyma be informed of it. Otherwise, when the moment has come to strike the grand blow, he would doubtless counteract our plans"

"You are right; I will tell him all immediately on my arrival at the camp."

"Very well, I count upon you."

"Make yourself easy on that head; now what must we do?"

"Continue to go on in the same direction."

"I thought so. My companion begins to be uneasy at seeing me thus pushing forward in an unknown country."

"When you have informed him he will make no more difficulties."

"That is true; but is this journey to last much longer?"

"Watch with care your approaches, for to-morrow we shall probably meet."

"Epoi! you will not fail us at the critical moment?"

"Trust to me; I have given you my word. Our movements will be so planned that both will act at once—the one in advance, the other in arrear; they will be taken as by the throw of a net. If we give them time to recognise us they will escape, so skilful are they. I cannot, therefore, too much urge you to act with the greatest circumspection."

"In your turn, trust in me, Don Zeno. If I have your word, you have mine."

"I trust you, then."

"You remember our agreement?"

"Certainly."

"And you will act accordingly?"

"Blindly, although—permit me to tell you—I do not understand your demand."

"One day you will understand me, and then, take my word for it, Don Zeno, you will thank me."

"Be it so; as you like, you are an undecipherable man; I give up your explaining yourself."

"And you are right," answered the chief, laughing; "for you would lose your time and your pains; only, remember, Don Zeno, that, white or red, you have not a better friend than I am."

"Of that I am convinced; however, I avow that if some day you tell me your history, I expect to hear marvellous things."

"And terrible things also, Don Zeno. This history, if you will have a little patience, I promise to tell you; it will interest you more than you think."

"It is possible; but, meanwhile, let us think of the affair we have in hand."

"Leave that to me; I must quit you."

"Already! we have scarcely said a few words."

"I have a long journey to make, you know."

"True; I will not detain you, then."

"And the proofs that you are to give me?"

"You shall have them in a moment."

"Of what do they consist?"

"In guipos, and especially in letters. You know how to read, do you not?"

"Enough to decipher these papers."

"Here is the affair," added he, drawing forth a rather voluminous packet and handing it to the Indian.

"Thank you," answered the latter; "thank you, and I shall soon see you again, eh?"

"Most probably we shall see one another again, even to-day."

"So much the better; I should be delighted if it were all over."

"And I also."

The two men once more shook hands. The gaucho remounted his horse, and set off; he soon disappeared in the darkness.

The Congonar whistled to his horse, which came running at his call, and he set off in the direction of the camp. His horse, refreshed by the rest he had had during the conference of the two men, appeared to annihilate space.

The Indian's ordinarily sombre countenance had a joyous expression which was not natural to it. He pressed to his chest the packet which the gaucho had given him. as if he feared it would escape him; and as he galloped allowed exclamations of pleasure to escape him, which would have much astonished the warriors of his tribe.

He made such haste that he re-entered the camp about two hours before day-break.

After having sent his horse among the others, he laid himself down before a fire, taking care to wrap his precious packet in his poncho, then he closed his eyes, murmuring in a low voice, and between his teeth—

"I have well earned two or three hours of repose; and I think I shall sleep well, for now I am content."

Indeed, five minutes later he slept as if he would never wake again.

However, at sunrise the Congonar was one of the first awake, and the first up.

Gueyma, crouched near him, waited his awaking.

"Already up?" said the old chief to him.

"Is there anything extraordinary in that?"

"True. Why do they not raise the camp?"

"I did not wish to give the order for it before speaking with you."

"Ah! very well; speak, Gueyma; I am listening."

"Have you forgotten what we said yesterday evening?"

"We said many things, my friend; it is possible that amongst the number I have forgotten some."

"We agreed to assemble the council this morning."

"True; have you done it?"

"No, not yet; you were asleep, my friend; I did not wish to take upon myself the order?"

"You are good and generous, Gueyma," answered the old man. "Do me a favour."

"What, my friend?"

"Do not convoke the council yet."

The young chief fixed on him an inquiring look.

"Yes," continued the Congonar, "what I say astonishes you, I can well understand; but we must have a serious conversation before this convocation."

"A conversation?"

"Yes; I have to communicate to you matters of the highest importance. Be patient; grant me till the halt for the morning meal—that is not too much to exact, I think?"

"You are my friend and my father, Congonar."

"Thank you, Gueyma, thank you; now give the order for the raising of the camp."

"That is what I will do immediately."

"Ah! recommend the greatest vigilance to the warriors; the enemy is near."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO CHIEFS.

By degrees, as the Guaycurus warriors advanced towards the mountains, the landscape assumed a more severe and more picturesque aspect.

The road mounted by an almost imperceptible slope, by risings of earth which serve, so to speak, as gigantic steps to the first chain of the Cordilleras.

The forests became more dense, the trees were larger and more closely packed. Hidden streams might have been heard murmuring—torrents which precipitate themselves from the height of the mountains, and, uniting, form rivers, which at some leagues in the plain acquire great importance.

Large flights of vultures wheeled slowly, high in the air, uttering harsh and discordant cries.

Gueyma had not neglected any precautions; scouts had been dispatched in advance in order to search the woods, and to discover, if possible, the tracks that they suspected would not fail them in these regions.

Other Indians had quitted their horses, and, right and left, on the flanks of the troop, searched the forest.

The Guaycurus advanced in a long and close column—the eye on the watch and the hand on their arms, ready to make use of them at the first signal.

The two chiefs marched in front, about twenty paces from their companions.

When they were in the middle of a thick forest, the immense masses of verdure not only deprived them of a view of the sky, but also intercepted the burning rays of the sun; and when the horsemen, whose horses were passing through a long and thick grass, filed through the trees silently as a legion of phantoms, the Congonar placed his hand on the arm of his companion.

"Let us speak Spanish," said he; "I do not wish any longer to delay giving you that information I have promised you. If we have to be attacked, it will only be in the neighbourhood of such an unlucky place as that in which we now find ourselves. I am much deceived if we shall not soon hear resounding under these arches of foliage the war-cry of our enemies. It is time, then, that I explained myself clearly to you, for perhaps it will be too late when we arrive at the encampment. Listen to me, then, attentively, and whatever you hear me say, my dear Gueyma, concentrate in yourself your emotions, and do not exhibit in your features either anger, joy, or astonishment."

"Speak, Congonar."

The Congonar seemed lost in thought.

Gueyma remained patiently waiting for him to speak.

At length, looking fixedly at the younger man—

"The time has not yet come," pursued the old man, "to reveal the whole truth. Let it suffice, at present, to know that, brought up among the whites, whose faith and customs I had adopted, it is not for you, Gueyma—for you whose birth I remember, and whom I love as a son—that I have consented to abandon the numberless enjoyments of civilised life. I had taken an oath of vengeance and devotion. This oath I have religiously kept. The vengeance, a long time prepared by me in secret, will be so much the more terrible as it will have been slow to strike the guilty. In the great act that I meditate, Gueyma, you will aid me, for they are your interests alone that I have constantly defended."

"What you tell me," answered the young chief, with emotion, "my heart has had a presentiment of. For a long time I have known and appreciated, as I ought, the faithful and almost boundless friendship which you have manifested for me. You will, therefore, render me this justice, Congonar, that I have always conformed to your advice."

"It is true, my boy, you have acted thus; but when we talk between ourselves, call me Diogo. This is the name they formerly gave me when I was among the whites."

"Well, my friend, as you wish it, I will call you so between ourselves, till you permit me, or till circumstances permit me, to resume boldly in the face of all a name which I am sure you have honoured all the time you have borne it."

"Yes," answered the old man, with complaisance, "there was a time when the name of Diogo had a certain celebrity; but who remembers it now?"

"Resume, I beg, what you commenced to tell me, and do not dwell any more on painful memories."

"You are right, Gueyma; let me forget them for a time. What I have said has no other design than that of proving to you that, if often I have apparently arrogated to myself the right of counselling you, or of wishing you to modify your plans, this right was acquired by long services and a devotion under all circumstances to yourself."

"I have never had, my friend, the thought of discussing your acts or counteracting your projects."

"I am pleased to render you this justice, my friend; but if I insist so much on this subject, it is that the circumstances in which we are now placed demand that you have entire confidence in me. The Brazilians, believing they no longer want us, now that they have seized upon the greater part of the towns of the Banda Orientale, would not be sorry to be free of us, and to allow us to be crushed by superior forces. Forgetting the services that, from the commencement of the war, we have rendered them, they not only abandon us in a cowardly way, but wish to deliver us to the enemy, in the hope that, succumbing, notwithstanding our courage, under the weight of superior force, we shall be all massacred."

"I feared this treason," answered Gueyma. "You remember that I was opposed to the conclusion of the treaty."

"Yes, I even remember that it was I who induced you to conclude it. Well, my friend, I foresaw this treason; I will say now—I hoped it."

The young chief turned sharply to his companion, looking at him with the most lively surprise.

"I begged you," resumed the old man, "to wait. Collect yourself, then, my friend, in order to avoid awakening the suspicions of our warriors."

"I am listening to you; but what you say to me is so extraordinary——"

"That you do not understand me—is that it? But, patience; you will soon have the explanation of this mystery, especially as I shall be able to give you this explanation without perilling the success of the projects that I meditate."

"All this appears to me strange," said Gueyma.

The Congonar smiled silently, and after having cast an inquiring look around him, he unaffectedly approached his companion, and, leaning towards his ear—

"Do you like the whites?" he asked.

"No," decisively answered the chief; "but I do not entertain any hatred towards them."

"Just so; however, my friend, if it is allowable for me to boast before you of my experience, let me tell you that every sentiment is unjust when it is exclusive; that the example you have led, the examples you have had under your eyes, indispose you

towards the company of the whites. I understand this; but amongst the whites there are some good. I even intend soon to make you acquainted with one of them."

"Me!" cried the young man.

"You, certainly; and why not, if it conduce to the success of our plans?"

"My friend, you speak in a way that is entirely incomprehensible to me. Be plain with me, and do not let me thus fatigue myself to no purpose."

"Well, in a few words, here is what has happened: The Brazilian general with whom we treated had but one motive—to remove us from our hunting-territories, and to remove us in such a way as we should never return."

"But it appears to me that if such were his design, he has attained it to a certain extent."

"Perhaps he has realised the half of his plan, but the other half will not succeed so easily. He is your most implacable enemy."

"Me! But he does not know me, my friend."

"You think so, dear Gueyma; but I am in a better position than you to judge the matter."

"It is sufficient; I am happy to know what you tell me."

"Why so?"

"Because the first time that chance brings me into his presence I shall make no scruple to cleave his head open."

"Be careful not to do that, my friend!" cried the Congonar, with a start of fear. "If you should find yourself face to face with him, it will be necessary for you to feign the most complete indifference to him. Remember this advice, and make use of it. Vengeance has been prepared for him long ago. What I tell you appears to you, I know, incomprehensible; but I do not wish to insist any more on this point; we shall not be long before we reach the spot assigned for the encampment, and I have to speak to you of another person towards whom I shall be happy to see you profess the most frank and amicable sentiments."

"And who is this person, if you please, my friend? Does he belong to our race, or is he a white?"

"I speak of a white, my dear Gueyma, and, moreover, of a white who, up to the present time, you have thought one of our deadliest enemies; in a word, Zeno Cabral."

"I admire the prudence which you manifested at the commencement of this conversation, in recommending me not to allow myself to express any mark of surprise."

"Yes, you sneer," answered the Congonar, "and apparently you are right; however, events will show you are wrong."

"Upon my word, I avow to you, my friend, that I feel myself attracted towards him by a feeling that I cannot analyse, and which—in spite of the wish I have often had to do so—has always prevented me from hating him."

"Do you speak truth?"

"I assure you it is so; I feel myself constrained to love him."

"Love him then, my friend; follow the impulse of your heart; it will not deceive you. This man is, indeed, really worth your friendship."

"How so?"

"I will shortly present you to each other."

"You will make me acquainted with Zeno Cabral?"

"Yes."

"Surely he will not dare to come into our camp!"

"In case of need, he would not hesitate to do so; but it is not in this way that we must act; we, on the contrary, will go to find him."

"We?"

"Certainly."

"Oh! oh! have you well reflected, my friend, on the consequences of such a proceeding? If this man should spread a net for us?"

"We have nothing of that sort to fear from him."

Gueyma lowered his head with a pensive air. For a long time the two chiefs continued thus to ride side by side without exchanging a word, absorbed each by his own thoughts. At last the young man looked up and said:

"We shall soon be at the spot where we have decided to camp. Have you nothing more to say?"

"Nothing at present, my friend. We shall soon resume this conversation; now we must instal our warriors in a secure position, for, perhaps, we shall remain in this encampment longer than you suppose."

"What! shall we not set out again in a few hours?"

"It is scarcely probable, but for that matter you will decide for yourself when the time has come."

And, as if he wished to prevent the young chief asking him a question that he probably would not have cared to answer, the Congonar checked his bridle, and allowed his companion to pass him.

Meanwhile the pathway broadened more and more, the forest became less dense, and, after having turned a corner, the Indians came out on to a kind of rather large esplanade, entirely denuded of trees, although covered with a tall and coarse grass. This esplanade formed what in Mexico they call a voladero, that is to say, that from this side the base of the mountain—which the Guaycurus had traversed almost without perceiving it, by a gentle declivity, worn away by the streams, or by an inundation produced by one of those convulsions so frequent in this country—formed beneath the esplanade an enormous cavity, which gave it the appearance of a gigantic balcony, and rendered it on this side almost impossible to attack.

On the opposite side, the flanks of the mountain were escarped in abrupt blocks of rock, on the edge of which the vicunias and the llamas alone would have been able to place their delicate feet without fear of falling.

The only accessible points were those by which the esplanade was reached—a point most easy to defend by means of some trunks of trees thrown across it.

Gueyma could not restrain a smile of satisfaction at the sight of this natural fortress.

"What a misfortune that we must in a few hours abandon so advantageous a position!" murmured he.

The Congonar smiled without answering, and proceeded to organise the camp. Some warriors went to seek the wood necessary for the fires, others felled several trees, leaving all the branches on, and which thus formed an almost impregnable entrenchment.

The horses were unsaddled and set at liberty, so that they could get at the green grass.

The fires lighted, they prepared the morning meal, and the Guaycurus warriors soon found themselves installed on the esplanade in as firm a position as if they intended to make a long stay.

When the sentinels were stationed, the meal was finished, and the warriors were stretched here and there to repose—according to the invariable custom of Indians, who do not think that, unless in exceptional circumstances, they should remain awake when they can sleep—the Congonar approached Gueyma.

"You feel fatigued?" he asked, with a significant gesture.

"Not at all," answered he; "but why?"

"Simply because I intend to go out a little on discovery, to assure myself that the country is clear; and that if you like to accompany me we will go together."

"I should like nothing better," answered Gueyma, who felt that the excursion was but a pretext to deceive the warriors.

"If it is to be so," pursued the Congonar, "let us set out without waiting any longer."

The young man immediately rose and took his gun.

"We go on foot?" said he.

"Certainly, our horses would embarrass us; they would only retard our progress."

"Let us go then."

The two chiefs immediately quitted the camp by the point opposite to that by which they had arrived, but not without having recommended an inferior chief to watch with the greatest vigilance over the common safety.

They were not long in disappearing in the midst of the thick shrubbery and trees.

They walked at a good pace, contenting themselves by at times casting an inquiring look around them.

Gueyma silently followed, inwardly asking himself what was the design of this mysterious excursion.

As to the old man, he advanced without any hesitation, proceeding through this labyrinth of verdure with a certainty which showed a perfect knowledge of the place, and previously determined plan, for the two chiefs had left the track, and without following any path, they walked straight on, surmounting the obstacles which from time to time came in their way.

In about half an hour they reached the dry bed of a torrent, which formed a large hollow in the mountain, and clinging with hands and feet, with that skill which characterises the Indians, to the rugged stones, the tufts of grass, and the branches of shrubbery, they began to descend rapidly by a rather rude declivity, and which, to any other men, would have presented great difficulty, and even danger.

About half-way down, the Congonar stepped on a fragment of rock, before a natural excavation.

After looking in all directions, the old man made a sign to his companion to place himself near him.

"We must enter," pointing to the cavern.

"Ah!" answered the young man; "if that is the case, let us not stop here any longer; let us enter."

"One moment," pursued the Congonar; "let us first assure ourselves that he has arrived."

"Arrived! Who?" asked the young man.

"He whom we wish to see, probably," said the old man.

"Ah! very well; only it is you, not I, who wish to see the person of whom you speak."

"Let us not play upon words, my friend; it is as important to you as to me, believe me, that this interview takes place."

"You know that I allow myself to be entirely guided by you. After this conversation which is about to take place, I shall probably be in a better position to know of what importance to me is this proceeding, which, I avow, I only enter upon with misgiving."

The Congonar opened his lips as though he was about to answer, but immediately changing his mind, he turned with an abrupt movement, and, after having again explored the locality, imitated twice the cry of the condor.

Almost immediately a similar cry came from the cavern.

The old man quickly approached the entrance, and slightly leaning forward, as he cocked his gun to be ready for any emergency:

"We have walked a long time, we are fatigued," said he, as if he addressed his companion; "let us rest here a few minutes; this solitary place appears to me to be safe."

"You will be received there by good friends," immediately replied a voice from the interior of the cavern.

The sound of steps was heard, and a man appeared.

The new-comer, clothed in the picturesque costume of the Banda Orientale, was no other than Zeno Cabral.

Gueyma remarked, with a surprise which he did not attempt to conceal, that the chief of the Montoneros had no arms, at least, apparently.

"Welcome," said he, bowing; "I have waited for you some time."

The Guaycurus captains bowed silently, and followed him, without hesitation, into the cavern.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROYAL ARMY.

We will abandon for some time the Guaycurus chiefs, to transport ourselves twenty leagues off, in the very heart of the Cordilleras, where were certain personages which have much to do with this narrative, and where, two or three days before that we have reached, events had passed which we must relate.

The civil war, in destroying the old hierarchy, established by the Castilians in their colonies, and in overturning ranks and castes, had brought to the surface of Hispano-American society certain persons very interesting to study, and amongst whom the Pincheyras undoubtedly held the most prominent place.

Let us state who were these Pincheyras, whose name has already several times been mentioned.

Pincheyra began like the greater part of the partisans of this epoch—that is to say, that at first he was a bandit. Born at San Carlos, in the centre of that province of Manli whose inhabitants never bowed to the yoke of the Incas, and only submitted to that of the Spaniards, Don Pablo Pincheyra was an Indian from head to foot; the blood of the Arancans flowed almost unmixed in his veins; so that, when he was outlawed, and constrained to seek a refuge among the Indians, the latter responded with alacrity to his first call, and came joyfully around him, to form the nucleus of that redoubtable squadron which afterwards was to be called the royal army.

Pincheyra had three brothers. These men, who had gained but a scanty subsistence in wielding by turns the lasso and the hatchet—that is to say, in working on the farms and as woodcutters—seized the opportunity which their elder brother offered them, and attached themselves to him, in company with all the scapegraces it was possible to recruit.

Thus, the Pincheyras, as they were called, were not long in becoming the terror of the country that they had been pleased to choose as the theatre of their exploits.

When they had pillaged the great chacras, and put the hamlets to ransom, they

took refuge in the desert, and here they braved with impunity the powerful rage of their enemies.

In fact, in these far-off regions, Justice, too weak, cannot make herself respected, and her agents, notwithstanding their good will, were obliged to remain spectators of the depredations daily committed by the bandits.

Don Pablo Pincheyra was far from being an ordinary man. Nature had been bountiful to him. To the courage of a lion he added a rare sagacity, a keenness of perception which was uncommon, united to manners full of nobility and affability.

Thus, events aiding, the bold chief of the bandits, far from being disquieted by his incessant acts of brigandage, knew how to make himself acceptable, not only as a partisan, but also to be sought after and solicited by those whose interest it had so long been to crush him, but who now found themselves obliged to claim his aid.

Don Pablo did not allow himself to be dazzled by this new caprice of fortune; he found himself at once equal to the part which chance called on him to play, and he boldly declared for Spain against the revolution.

His troop, considerably augmented by the deserters and volunteers, who came to range themselves under his banner, was by degrees disciplined, thanks to some European officers which Don Pablo had succeeded in obtaining, and the old squadron of bandits was metamorphosed almost immediately into a regular troop—nearly an army—since it numbered in infantry and cavalry more than 1,500 combatants, a considerable number at that time in these sparsely-populated countries.

When he considered that the royal army, as he emphatically called it, was in a position to take the field, Don Pablo Pincheyra boldly took the offensive, and commenced hostilities against the insurgents, falling upon them suddenly, and defeating them in several encounters.

The Pincheyras knew the most secret hiding-places in the Cordilleras. Their expeditions over, they withdrew into these retreats, so much the more inaccessible, as they were defended not only by desolate solitude, but by the terror which these redoubtable partisans inspired. They cared for nothing, and spared neither children, women, nor old men, dragging them after them, attached by the wrists to the tails of their horses.

Another partisan chief also fought for the defence of the losing cause of Spain. He was named Zinoxain.

Thus, at the time when South America, from Mexico to the frontiers of Patagonia, rose at once against the odious yoke of Spain, and boldly proclaimed its independence, two isolated men, without any other *prestige* than their indomitable energy, sustained only by Indian bravos, and adventurers of all nations, heroically struggled against the current which was carrying them away.

Notwithstanding the misdeeds of these men—the Pincheyras especially—there was something really grand in this determination not to abandon the fortune of their old masters. Accordingly, even now, after so many years, their names in these countries are surrounded with a kind of halo of glory, and they have become to the mass of the people legendary beings, whose incredible exploits are related with respectful fear.

At about twenty leagues from the spot where the Guaycurus had stopped till the hottest part of the day had passed—in the centre of a vast valley, crowned on all sides by the snowy and inaccessible peaks of the Cordilleras—Don Pablo Pincheyra had established his camp.

This camp, placed near the source of two rivers, was not provisional, but permanent; so it rather resembled a town than a bivouac of soldiers. The huts—made in the Indian fashion, in the form of toldos, with stakes crossed at the top, and covered with leather from the hides of cows and mares—affected a kind of

symmetry in their position, forming streets, squares, and crossways, having corrals, filled with oxen and horses. Some of them had little gardens, where were grown, as well as it could be done, considering the region of the climate, a few kitchen herbs.

In the centre of the camp were the toldos of the officers, and of the four brothers Pincheyra—toldos, better built, better furnished, and much cleaner than those of the soldiers.

Entrance could only be had into the valley where the camp was established by two narrow canones, situated one at the east, and the other at the south-west of the camp; but these two canones were so fortified by means of heaps of wood massed together, apparently pell-mell, but perfectly arranged nevertheless, that any attempt to force the double entry of these canones would have been vain. The sentinels planted there, however—their eyes fixed on the windings of the defiles—watched attentively over the common safety, while their companions, withdrawn under their toldos, lounged at their occupations with an easy carelessness which showed they were certain they had no serious danger to fear.

The toldo of Don Pablo Pincheyra was easy to recognise at the first glance. Two sentinels paced before it, and several horses, saddled and ready to be mounted, were attached to pickets at some paces from the door, over which, from a long lance fixed in the ground, floated majestically the Spanish flag, in the inconstant play of the fresh morning breeze. Women—amongst whom several were young and pretty, though their features were for the most part tarnished by sorrow and excessive labour—traversed the streets of the camp, carrying water, wood, or provisions; some at the entrance of the toldos were occupied in the cares of the house; and soldiers mounted on strong horses, and armed with long lances, drove the animals out of the corrals, and led them to the pasturage outside the camp. In fact, all was bustle and animation in this strange repair of the bandits, who called themselves the royal army; and yet, through all this excitement and apparent disorder it was easy to recognise a regulating mind, and a powerful will which directed all, without ever meeting objection or even hesitation on the part of the subordinates.

At the moment we enter the camp a man wearing the costume of the gauchos of the pampas of Buenos Ayres, lifted the fressada, a covering serving for a door to a toldo, built with some regularity, and after having cast around him a curious and anxious look, left the toldo, and entered the street.

Like all the inhabitants of this singular centre of population, this man was armed to the teeth, with a sabre which hung at his left side, a pair of long pistols passed through his girdle, a knife with a straight blade fixed on his right polena, and the horn handle of which rested on this thigh, and a double-barrelled gun, which was thrown on his shoulder.

Notwithstanding this formidable arsenal which he carried with him, the man of whom we speak appeared by no means at his ease. His hesitating walk, the furtive glances which he continually threw around him—all denoted a misgiving which he tried vainly to conceal, but which he could not succeed in conquering.

"Parbleu!" murmured he, in a low voice, "I am an idiot, upon my honour! One man is as good as another; and if it should come to blows, it must. If I am killed all will be over. I should like that the more, as this absurd existence begins to weigh heavily on me. What magnificent vagabonds! It would be impossible, I think, to meet their equals. Ah!" added he, with a sigh of regret, "if it were only possible for me to sketch some of them! But no, these fellows have no love for art; it is impossible to trace them for a moment."

And Emile Gagnepain—for the reader has doubtless already recognised him—gave a second sigh, more profound than the first.

Meanwhile, he continued to advance hastily towards one of the outlets of the camp. His step had become by degrees more firm; he proudly raised his head, and succeeded in affecting the most complete carelessness.

The painter had nearly traversed the entire length of the camp; he had reached a rather large toldo, serving as a corps de garde for the soldiers, watching at the intrenchments; and he hastened his pace with the design, no doubt, of escaping the inquisitive questions of some lazy partisan, when he felt himself tapped on the shoulder. Although this touch had nothing aggressive in it, and was, on the contrary, quite friendly, the young man started; but, putting a good face on it, he immediately turned, and assuming the most amiable look that he could, he held out his hand to him who had thus come upon him unawares, and smilingly saluted him with the buonos dias caballero, which is the rule throughout Spanish territory.

"Buenos Dios; Senor Frenchman," gaily answered his visitor, and gently pressing his hand, "you are well, I hope. It must be by chance like this for me to have the pleasure of glancing at your friendly face."

"What do you wish, Don Pablo?" answered the painter. "The cares of your command absorb you so much that you become unapproachable, whatever desire I may have to visit you."

Don Pablo Pincheyra—for it was he—smiled craftily.

"Is that really the motive which makes you avoid me?" said he.

"Avoid you?"

"Well, find another expression if you can; I will say abstain from seeking me, if you prefer it."

"You make a mistake, Don Pablo," answered the young man, with firmness; "I do not avoid you any more than I have reason to abstain from seeking you, and the proof——"

"The proof?" interrupted Don Pablo.

"At this very moment I was proceeding towards the intrenchments in the hope of meeting you."

"Ah! ah!" said he; "then, as it is so, I am happy, caballero, that chance has so well served you."

"Chance has nothing to do in the affair."

"It would have been better, however, to have come simply to my toldo."

"That is not my opinion, since I meet you here."

"That is true," said the partisan, laughing; "you have an answer for everything, my dear sir. Will you acquaint me with the reasons to which I owe the honour of this tardy visit?"

"Believe me, dear Don Pablo, this place is not well suited for a serious conversation."

"Ah!" said Don Pablo; "is it then important business on which you have to speak?"

"It could not be more important."

"If that is the case, I am compelled to beg you to defer this conference for some hours."

"May I be permitted, without appearing impertinent, to ask you the motive of this delay?"

"Oh! mon Dieu! I have no secrets from you. The fact is, that I expect every moment the arrival of certain persons with whom I must have a conversation of the highest importance."

"Pardon, Seigneur Don Pablo, but these persons to whom you allude—I think I know them."

The black eye of Don Pablo Pincheyra darted a flashing look, which he immediately controlled.

"And you infer from that, my dear sir?——"

"I infer, Seigneur Don Pablo, that it would be best that you consented to hear me first."

The painter, whose mind was made up, and who felt anger working within him, had become severe and sharp.

On his side, Don Pablo, under his feigned friendliness, concealed a resolution previously made. Between these two men who spoke thus, a strange scene was thus being enacted.

It was the partisan who renewed the conversation.

"So, Senor Frenchman," said he, "you had left your toldo with the intention of paying me a visit."

"Yes, seigneur."

"To me specially."

"Yes, to you."

"Eh!" said he, with an expressive sneer, pointing to the young man's girdle, which was furnished with arms; "you will admit that you take singular precautions when you come to see your friends."

"We are in a country, seigneur," coldly answered the painter, "where it is well to be always on one's guard."

"Even with one's friends?"

"Especially with one's friends," said he, sharply.

"Well," resumed the partisan, "follow me secretly, that we may be able to talk without interruption."

"I will do so."

"You will remark, senor, that I have more confidence in you than you deign to show towards me."

"Because, seigneur?——"

"Because I am without arms."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"You act as you think fit," said he, coldly; "perhaps you are wrong, perhaps you are right."

"I do not fear being assassinated."

"If that insult is addressed to me, it fails. If I am taking precautions, it does not follow that I am capable of assassinating you."

The partisan shook his head with an air of doubt.

"People furnish themselves with arms," continued the young man, with a cutting accent, "to defend themselves against the attacks of wild beasts."

"Well, well, Senor Frenchman," said Don Pablo, in a melancholy tone, "come without any more words; I have but a few minutes to give you."

While exchanging these bitter complaints, the two men had proceeded side by side, and had left the camp.

They continued thus to advance into the country till they had reached a rather retired spot—a kind of elbow formed by a turn in the canon in which they were, and where they could be neither seen nor heard; whilst they, on the other hand, could see a considerable distance to right and left up and down the road which led to the camp, and on which no one could have appeared without being discovered.

"I think, Senor Frenchman," said Don Pablo, "that this place will suit you; be so good, then, to speak."

"So I will," answered the Frenchman, placing on the ground the butt-end of his gun, and leaning his two hands on the end of the barrel.

"Oh! we are quite alone; come," pursued Don Pablo, with an ironical smile, "you can speak without fear."

"I have no fear, but I have so many things to say that I do not really know how to commence."

"As you like; only, make haste if you wish me to hear you to the end."

"The Spanish officer whom you expect will not be here for an hour, at least; we have time, then."

"How do you know that I expect a Spanish officer?"

"What does that matter, if it is so?"

"Senor Frenchman," pursued he, "take care how you penetrate my secrets before I should wish you to know them. For two months that we have lived together you have been, I suppose, in a position to know me."

"You would do well to speak thus if these affairs concerned you alone; but as, unhappily, I find myself concerned in them, they are as much mine as yours."

"Come, explain yourself frankly and honourably, as a man, instead of prating like an old woman?"

"It is two months," resumed the young man, "that we have lived together, as you yourself have said. What have you done during these two months? How have you kept the promise you made me?"

"Have I not saved the two ladies, as I promised, from the peril that threatened them?"

"Yes, but to make them fall into one still worse."

"I do not understand you, senor."

"You understand me very well. Unhappily for you, you have not yet reached the point where you think you are. I have sworn to defend these poor ladies, and I will defend them."

"You are mad, senor; no one that I know has any intention to injure these ladies in any way. Since their arrival here at Casa-Frama, you cannot deny that they have been treated with the greatest attention and respect."

"They complain of being exposed to misplaced and dishonouring attentions on your part; moreover, they say that, far from giving them that liberty that you had engaged to give them, you sequester them."

Don Pablo shrugged his shoulders with disdain.

"The women are all alike," said he, with irony; "nothing will satisfy them. I am in a better position than these ladies are to judge what is fitting for them. Besides, if they will keep quiet, they will not have long to remain here, and if the sight of my companions shocks them, they will soon be delivered from it."

"It is not the sight of your companions which shocks them, but yours and your brothers—the ridiculous homage with which you fatigue them every hour of the day."

The features of the partisan contracted, a terrific pallor covered his face, and his eyebrows were knitted.

"Take care, senor," cried he in a sullen tone, "take care; you are in my power—do not forget that; and I am the man whom his enemies have called the Bear of Casa-Frama."

"What matters it to me the names they give you?" cried Emile, forgetting all bounds; "one only will suit you—that of bandit."

"Vive Dieu!" cried he with violence, "this insult deserves blood! A coward only dares thus to outrage a man without arms."

"Nonsense," resumed the young man, with contempt; "without arms," and, with a gesture of nobility, he threw a pistol at the feet of the partisan. "Pardieu! that is a good evasion! If you are as brave as you pretend, here is a weapon—do me justice."

"Rayo di Dios!" cried the partisan, with rage, "you shall have the pleasure of it!"

And darting at the pistol, he cocked it, and discharged it almost close to the breast of the young man.

The fate of the latter seemed doomed. Considering the little distance which separated him from his adversary, nothing apparently could save him. Happily the partisan, blinded by rage, had not calculated his fire; the ball, badly directed, instead of striking the Frenchman full in the body, only made a slight graze.

"Your life belongs to me," coolly said the young man, cocking his pistol in his turn.

"Blow my brains out, carai!" cried Don Pablo; "fire, and let all be over."

"No," replied the young painter, without emotion; "it is well for you to see the difference which exists between a man of your sort and of mine."

"Which means——?" murmured the partisan, whom rage stifled.

"That I pardon you!" said Emile.

"Pardon, you say—pardon?" cried he, with the roar of a tiger, "to me!"

"To you, pardieu! to whom else?"

And coolly pushing away with his wounded arm the partisan, who had darted towards him, he raised his pistol, and discharged it over his head. Don Pablo remained an instant astounded, his eyes bloodshot, his features livid, his hands clenched, incapable of understanding the grandeur of this action, but conquered, in spite of himself, by the ascendancy that the young man had in an instant acquired over his rude nature.

"Your life, then," quietly resumed the young man, "belongs to me; I have given it you back. I only demand in return one thing."

"You demand something of me," said he, with a mocking sneer. "And if I should not choose to accord you anything?"

"Oh, then," pursued he, with the greatest coolness, "as everything must have an end, and as it is always allowable to rid one's self of a wild beast, I shall blow your brains out, as though you were a mad dog."

While speaking thus, Emile had taken his gun in his hand.

The partisan found himself again at the mercy of his adversary.

The former cast at him a look of hatred, but he could see by the countenance of his enemy that he would not hesitate to put his threat into execution. Then—thanks to that control which he had over himself—he brought back calmness to his features, which had been distorted by rage, and, bowing with a gracious smile—

"Be it so, I will do what you wish, senor. Your noble generosity has conquered my obstinacy. Speak."

"Swear on your salvation, by Our Lady of Solitude, to be faithful to what you engage to do."

"If I decline?"

"I will shoot you."

"I swear it, on my salvation, by Our Lady of Solitude."

This virgin, much venerated by the gauchos, the trappers, and other people of that kind, was the protectress of Don Pablo Pincheyra; he was very devoted towards her, and no consideration whatever would have induced him to violate an oath made in her name. Emile was aware of this circumstance.

"During three days from this time you will not take any steps against the two ladies confided to my care."

"I swear it."

At this moment a distant gallop was heard, and a troop of horsemen appeared.

"Here are the persons whom you expect," pursued Emile; "I should like to be present at your interview with them."

"Very well, you shall be present at it. Do you wish anything else?"

"Nothing."

"What, is that all?"

"Yes."

"You do not stipulate anything for your personal safety?"

"Nonsense," answered the young man, with disdain. "You are jesting, seigneur; what have I to fear from you? You would not dare to attempt the life of him who, master of yours, has refused to take it."

The partisan stamped his foot with rage, but he did not answer.

The horsemen rapidly approached; a few minutes more, and they would have overtaken the two men, who looked at them as they came on, without making any movement towards them.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT CASA-FRAMA.

The horsemen who advanced in the canon, in the direction of Casa-Frama, formed a troop of about thirty men. All were well-armed and well-mounted. Their costume had a military appearance, and, although riding at a hand-gallop, they preserved their order, and rather resembled soldiers than peaceable travellers.

Two horsemen, mounted on magnificent black animals, richly harnessed, preceded by a few paces the body of the troop, and were talking together with some animation. They had not yet perceived Don Pablo or the French painter, who, half hidden by the fragments of rock, observed them attentively.

"These are indeed the persons whom I expected," said he; "come, let us go into the camp again."

"Why not receive them here where we are?"

"Better that they should not find us here; I ought to receive these people with a certain decorum."

"As you like; but it will be rather difficult to re-enter the camp without being overtaken by them."

"Do not be uneasy about that," pursued Don Pablo, smiling; "still follow me."

"Let us go," said the painter, repressing a movement of curiosity.

Indeed, it seemed impossible, from the place where they were, for the two men to regain the camp without being perceived.

However, against all probability, it was nothing of the kind.

The partisan, followed by the painter, scaled some blocks of rock, massed without apparent order one upon the other, and found himself at the entrance of a natural cavern, of which so many exist in the mountains, and into which, having removed the brambles and brushwood which masked the mouth of it, he boldly entered. The cavern was large, spacious, and airy; daylight penetrated it by imperceptible fissures, and produced a dim light sufficient to walk without fear and to wander in this labyrinth of galleries, which opened right and left.

After a rapid walk of few minutes, a dull and continuous sound, resembling a considerable fall of water, was heard, and became louder and louder. At last the two men emerged from the cavern and found themselves on a narrow platform, two

or three yards broad at the most, masked completely by a sheet of water which fell from a great height two or three yards before the platform, and broke with a great sound upon a chaos of rocks twenty yards lower down, where it divided into two branches, forming a little farther off two distinct rivers.

"We have arrived," said the Pincheyra, turning towards his companion; "do you recognise this place?"

"Perfectly. It is just at the foot of this cascade that the camp is established; your toldo is not more than a gunshot from it."

"You are quite right. You see that I have not deceived you."

"But how shall we descend into the valley? It appears to me that the road is not practicable."

"You are mistaken; but you must give me your word as a caballero not to reveal to any one the secret that I confide to you. You understand the importance, in case of attack, of having a way by which I could escape with my companions without striking a blow?"

"I understand that perfectly, and I heartily take the oath you exact, especially as the confidence with which you have conducted me here is an unquestionable proof of the esteem you have for me."

"Come," said Don Pablo, "we will descend."

He then made a turn on the right, and gained the western extremity of the platform.

"See," said he.

The painter looked.

A ladder cut in the solid rock descended at a gentle declivity to a certain depth on the flanks of the mountain, and was lost in a thick cluster of forest trees.

"Chance, a long time ago," pursued Don Pablo, "revealed to me this passage at a time when I thought I should never have to make use of it. Now, it is very useful to me to enter and leave the camp without being seen; but we shall not remain long here. Come."

Don Pablo, with a confidence which would have been decided folly with any other man than the painter, then passed first, and began to descend.

Nothing would have been more easy than to make this partisan lose his equilibrium by gently pushing him as if by chance; but the thought did not even occur to the painter, notwithstanding the hatred which rankled in his heart against this man. He followed his enemy in this hazardous descent, as unconcerned as if he had made a promenade of pleasure with a friend.

It did not take them more than a few minutes to reach the base of the mountain, and place their feet in the valley.

"Here we are," said Don Pablo; "we ought to separate here; go to your affairs, and I will go to mine."

They were, in fact, in the middle of the camp, at a few paces only from the toldo of the chief.

"Are you not going to receive the strangers who are coming?" asked Emile.

"Yes, I am going to receive them, for they will be here in ten minutes or so; and as I have told you, I wish to pay them a certain amount of respect, to which they have a right."

"It was arranged between us, I thought, that I should assist at this interview?"

"Certainly, and I will keep my promise, you may depend; but this interview will not take place till later—in two or three hours. I am only now about to fulfil towards the strangers the duties of hospitality. When they have rested, we will occupy ourselves with business."

"I have your word, I will therefore make no further objection."

"God keep you, Senor Don Emile," answered the partisan.

The two men bowed, and without further discussion they turned their backs, and each went his way: Don Pablo proceeding to the entrance of the camp, where, no doubt, his presence would soon be required; and the painter returning to his toldo, where he soon arrived. A man was sitting on the threshold.

This man was Tyro the guaranis. At a few paces from him, crouched on the soil, two ragged individuals, armed to the teeth, were playing at monté. These persons were Mataseis and Sacatripas, the two bullies. Without disturbing themselves, they saluted their master, and continued the eager game they had commenced at sunrise, and which probably would last, unless important affairs called them off, until the end of the day.

At the sight of the Frenchman, Tyro quickly rose, raised the curtain of the toldo, and, after his master had entered, followed him.

"What news?" asked Emile.

"Nothing important apparently," answered the guaranis, "but much in reality."

"Ah!" said the young man, "what has happened?"

"Nothing, I repeat, my friend; however, I think you will do well to be on your guard."

"Eh! am I not always so?"

"But an increase of precaution could do no harm."

"Then you have learned something?"

"I have learned nothing positive as yet; however, I have my suspicions; soon, I hope, I shall be able to inform you."

"Have you seen the ladies to-day?"

"Yes, my friend; this morning I had the honour to pay them a visit; they are sorrowful and resigned as usual, and it is easy to see that their position becomes more painful to them every moment, and that their feigned resignation conceals a profound despondency."

"Alas!" murmured the young man, with sadness, "I am unhappily unable to be of service to them."

"Perhaps, my friend."

Emile quickly brightened up.

"You know something, do you not, my good Tyro?" cried Emile, with anxiety.

"I must say nothing yet, my friend; be patient. You shall soon know all."

"I have seen Don Pablo," said the young man.

"Ah!" said the guaranis, with curiosity.

"I shall assist at the interview."

"Good!" cried the Indian, joyfully rubbing his hands; "so much the better. Don Pablo has not made any difficulties."

"Hum! he only consented when the pistol was at his breast."

"No matter; the principal thing is that you will be present."

"You see that I have followed your counsel."

"Soon, my friend, you will yourself acknowledge the importance of it."

"God grant it! I confess that since I have been in this frightful den of Casa-Frama, I feel that I am losing all energy."

"Courage, my friend; perhaps you are nearer escaping from it than you suppose."

"You never speak except by enigmas."

"Excuse me; it is at present impossible for me to explain myself."

"Do as you like; I will not interfere in anything."

"Till the moment for action has arrived."

"But when this moment has come——?"

Tyro did not answer, occupied in preparing for his master's breakfast. Apparently absorbed by this grave occupation, he feigned not to hear.

"Now it is ready, my friend," said he; "eat and drink, you must require refreshment. We never know what the future reserves for us, and it is well to be prepared for anything that may happen."

The painter looked at him a moment attentively.

"Come," said he, sitting on a stool before the table, "you are plotting something?"

The guaranis burst out laughing.

"Ah!" said he, after a pause, "you know, my friend, that the engagement of our two companions terminated yesterday."

"What companions, and what engagements?" answered the young man, with his mouth full.

"Why, that of Mataseis and his worthy acolyte Sacatripas."

"Good, but what have I to do with that? These fellows have been paid in advance."

"Pardon, my friend; you owe them two months."

"How is that?"

"Because I have renewed their engagement for two months this very morning at the same price."

"What a strange idea to hamper us with these wretches! Would it not have been better to have sent them to get hanged somewhere else?"

"As to being hanged, make your mind easy; that will happen to them sooner or later. Meanwhile, I have thought it preferable to keep them in our service. Do you remember, my friend, that when we fight against bandits we should have some of the same stamp in our interests?"

"Do as you like, that's your affair; for you do everything according to your own notions. Keep them or don't keep them—I wash my hands of it."

"You are merry, my friend?"

"No, I am sad; I have sometimes a temptation to put an end to it by blowing out the brains of that cursed Pincheyra."

"Be careful not to give way to these temptations; not that I interest myself the least in the world in these Pincheyras, for I am reserving for Don Pablo and his brothers a dish of my own preparing, which they will find too highly spiced; but the moment has not yet come. Let us be patient, and, for a commencement, be present at the interview to-day, my friend; and open your ears, for if I do not much deceive myself, you will hear strange things."

"Yes, yes, I suppose that an interview with the colonel must be fertile in incidents."

"I wish to leave you the pleasure of the surprise, my friend. Are you going out?" he added.

"I intend to pay my respects to the ladies."

"You will not have time; moreover, you could not talk freely; the two sisters of Don Pablo are with them."

"These women appear to have received orders not to lose sight of these two unhappy ladies."

"It is probable that they have received instructions of the kind."

The young man did not answer, but he knitted his eyebrows, and stamped with rage.

Some minutes elapsed.

"Parbleu!" he cried at last, "I am a perfect ass to fret thus about things which cannot affect me, and which I cannot prevent! In fact, as life is a continual game

of see-saw. when I shall have reached the last step of bad fortune, I must re-mount, and then, according to fate, my position will improve. Bah! I will trust to Providence. He is more skilful than me, and will know well, when it pleases Him, how to enable me to escape from my embarrassment! However, it appears to me that it is time for a change; I am horribly wearied here. Upon my word, it was a splendid idea to come into this new world to seek tranquillity and patriarchal manners! Mercy on us! what patriots these Pincheyras are! and how true and copied from nature are the narratives of travel!"

And he laughed heartily.

As what precedes had been said in French, and consequently the Indian had not understood a word, he looked at the young man with a wondering air, which redoubled the hilarity of the latter. But a new personage at the moment appeared in the toldo, and by his presence calmed, as by enchantment, the gaiety of the Frenchman.

This personage was no other than Don Santiago Pincheyra, one of the brothers of Don Pablo; he to whom the young man had rendered so great a service on the occasion of his skirmish with the squadron of Zeno Cabral.

Brutal and morose as was Don Santiago, he appeared to have preserved some gratitude to the painter for this service, and on several occasions he had manifested a slight interest in him. It was owing to his influence that the painter was treated with consideration in the camp of the partisans, and nearly free to act in his own way without being exposed to the gross annoyance of this undisciplined troop of bandits.

"I see with pleasure that you do not breed melancholy among you, Seigneurs Frenchmen," said he, holding out his hand. "So much the better!"

"You see that I adapt myself to circumstances," answered Emile, pressing his hand. "Things that can't be helped should be forgotten. What brings me the honour of your visit, dear seigneur?"

"First, the desire of seeing you, and then, a message from my brother, Don Pablo Pincheyra."

"Believe me, that I feel as I ought this proof of courtesy, dear seigneur," said the young man; "and this message that, through you, his Excellency Colonel Don Pablo Pincheyra sends, is important."

"You will decide that better than me, senor; my brother requests your presence at the interview which is immediately to take place with some Spanish officers, who arrived about an hour ago at our head-quarters."

"I am honoured by his excellency deigning to think of me. I will present myself at the council when I shall have received the order to do so."

"This order I bring you, Seigneur Frenchman, and if you please to follow me I will accompany you to the place chosen for the interview."

"Very well, Seigneur Don Santiago, I am ready."

"Then we will set out, for they wait for you."

The painter exchanged with the guaranis a last look, to which the latter responded by one not less significant.

All was gossip at Casa-Frama; the unforeseen arrival of the strangers had awakened general curiosity; the streets were literally crammed with men, women, and children, who pressed towards the toldo of the colonel.

The two men had much difficulty in threading a passage through the crowd of idlers who obstructed the public way; and had it not been for Don Santiago, known and respected by all, the Frenchman would probably not have succeeded in reaching the spot he wanted.

Although the abode of Don Pablo Pincheyra bore the name of toldo, it was in

reality a vast and airy house built with the greatest possible care for the convenience of its owner. The walls were of clay, plastered and whitewashed carefully. The windows, with shutters painted green, and ornamented with climbing plants, which grew in various directions, gave it an air of gaiety which made it pleasant to look at. The door, preceded by a peristyle and a verandah, was in the centre of the building. Before this door a flag-staff was planted in the earth, surmounted by a Spanish flag. Two sentinels, armed with lances, were posted, one at the threshold of the door, the other at the foot of the flagstaff. A battery of six pieces of cannon was pointed a few paces in advance, half hidden at this moment by thirty horses, all harnessed, which champed their bits, and covered them with foam.

At the sight of Don Santiago the sentinels presented arms, and moved aside respectfully to give him passage, while the crowd was kept at a distance by some soldiers previously placed there for that purpose, and had no other means of slaking their curiosity than that of questioning the attendants of the strangers who were watching their masters' horses.

The two men entered the house. After having passed through a hall full of soldiers, they entered a room where several officers were talking in a high voice about the arrival of the strangers. Some of these officers approached Don Santiago to ask him the news; but the latter, who perhaps knew no more than they on this subject, or who had received strict instructions from his brother, only gave them evasive answers, and putting them aside gently with his hand, he at last entered the council-room, followed closely by the French painter, who began to be much interested in all he saw.

The council-room was a rather large apartment, the whitewashed walls of which were completely bare, with the exception of a large "Christ" in ivory, placed at the extremity of the room, above an arm-chair occupied by Don Pablo Pincheyra. To the right of this figure a wretched engraving, frightfully illuminated, purported to represent the King of Spain, crowned, and with the sceptre in his hand. To the left an engraving, not less ugly, representing Our Lady of Solitude.

The furniture was mean and primitive; some few benches and stools ranged against the walls, and a small table, formed the whole of it.

Don Pablo Pincheyra was dressed in the uniform of a Spanish colonel; near him was his brother, Don Jose Antonio, on the right; the place of Don Santiago on the left was for the time vacant; then came Father Gomez, chaplain of Don Pablo—a fat and jovial monk, but whose eyes sparkled with wit; several officers—captains, lieutenants, and subalterns, grouped without order round their chief—were leaning on their sabres.

Before the table was seated a tall, lean man, with ascetic features, and ambiguous, deceitful eyes. This was Don Justo Vallejos, secretary of Don Pablo; for. as he had given himself the luxury of a chaplain, this worthy colonel no doubt had felt all the greater need of attaching a secretary to his person.

A cabo, or corporal, stood near the door, and filled the functions of door-keeper, introducing the visitors.

"At last!" cried Don Pablo, perceiving the Frenchman; "I began to fear that you would not come."

"We have had great difficulty in reaching here," answered Don Santiago, taking the place which had been reserved for him.

"Now you have come, all is ready, Senor Frenchman; place yourself there, near my secretary."

The young man bowed silently, and, as he had received the order to do, he sat down near the secretary, who, in turn, bowed, and cast a furtive look at him by way of salute.

"Now, caballeros," pursued Don Pablo, addressing the company, "do not forget that representatives of his most sacred Majesty the King, our sovereign, are about to appear before us. Let us act, then, as the true caballeros that we are, and let us prove to them that we are not so savage as they perhaps have supposed."

The officers answered by a respectful bow, sat upright, and threw away their cigarettes.

Looking around him, Don Pablo assured himself that his wishes had been attended to, and that his officers had assumed an attitude more becoming than that they had previously taken, and then—

"Cabo Mendez," said he, "introduce to us the representatives of his Catholic Majesty the King of Spain and the Indies."

The corporal opened both leaves of the door, and the persons expected, who were in an adjoining apartment, entered the room with a grave and measured tread, after the corporal had repeated, with a clear voice, and in an emphatic tone, the last words of Don Pablo Pincheyra.

These strangers, to whom was given a title to which they probably had a very doubtful right, were to the number of five.

Their escort remained without. On perceiving them the young Frenchman with difficulty repressed an exclamation of surprise. Of the five persons he had recognised two whom he certainly was far from expecting to meet under such circumstances.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INTERVIEW.

If Emile Gagnepain became somewhat more calm, certainly the strange spectacle that he had before him had aroused not only his gaiety but his caustic fancy. This shameless parody of interviews accorded by the chiefs of a powerful nation to the representatives of another—played seriously by bandits with low and cruel features, and hands red with blood—half fox and half wolf—whose affected manners had something despicable and repulsive in them—disagreeably impressed the young man, and caused him to experience an undefinable sentiment of disgust and pity for the Spanish officers, who did not scruple to come and humbly implore the aid of these ferocious partisans, whom for a long time they had implacably pursued, to punish them for their innumerable misdeeds.

In fact, the Spanish officers appeared to be perfectly aware of their anomalous position, and of the reprehensible step, with regard to honour and the right of nations, that they did not at this moment scruple to take.

Notwithstanding the assurance they affected and their haughty bearing, the blush of shame covered their faces. In spite of them their heads drooped, and their eyes rested only with a kind of hesitation on the persons by whom they were surrounded, and who, without doubt, they wished had been less numerous.

This unusual ceremony, displayed before them with the evident design of cutting them off from all retreat, and of engaging them irrevocably, weighed upon them; for they understood all the bearings of such a measure, and the effect it could not fail to have beyond the mountains.

The bearing of the Pincheyras formed a striking contrast to that of the Spaniards. Tumultuously grouped round their chiefs, with mocking eye and sardonic lip, they whispered to each other, throwing disdainful glances over their shoulders.

Don Pablo Pincheyra and his brothers alone preserved a becoming countenance. They felt their hearts swell with pride as they thought of the parts, which fortune, by one of her incomprehensible caprices, called on them suddenly to play. They looked upon this attitude as serious, and really believed themselves called upon to replace, by the force of their arms, under Spanish domination, those rich colonies which had so providentially escaped them, by that just and implacable law of retaliation which wills that, sooner or later, the executioners shall become in their turn victims of those whom they have martyred.

When the strangers had been introduced by the cabo, and the first salutations had been exchanged, Don Pablo Pincheyra commenced—

"Welcome to Casa-Frama, caballeros," said he, bowing with studied politeness; "I will try, while you are pleased to stay among us, to render your visit agreeable."

"I thank you, caballero, in the name of my companions and my own," answered one of the strangers, "for the gracious welcome you have been pleased to give us; permit me on one point only to correct you. It is not a visit that we make to you; we come charged with an important mission by our sovereign and yours."

"We are ready to listen to your message, caballero; but first will you be so good as to acquaint us with your name?"

"I am," said the stranger, "Don Antonio Zinozain de Figueras, lieutenant-colonel in the service of his Majesty the King of Spain and the Indies."

"I have very often heard your name, senor caballero," interrupted Don Pablo

"Two others, captains of his Majesty, have been attached to me," continued Don Antonio, directing the partisan's attention to them, "Don Lucio Ortega and Don Estevan Mendoza."

The two officers, whose names had just been mentioned, ceremoniously bowed.

Pincheyra darted a piercing look at them and addressing him who had been designated by the name of Don Estevan Mendoza—

"Prudence, no doubt, has induced you, caballero, to conceal yourself modestly under the name of Don Estevan."

"Senor——" stammered the Spaniard.

"Reassure yourself, caballero," continued Don Pablo; "though these precautions are useless, I understand your scruples."

Don Estevan blushed with shame and confusion at these words, but he found no words to answer.

"Continue, I beg, caballero," said Don Pablo.

Don Antonio bowed and answered—

"The two other persons who accompany me are—the one an Indian Arancan chief, renowned——"

"I know him," said Pincheyra. "A long time ago Captain Marilaun and I slept side by side; I am, then, happy to see him."

"And I also," answered the chief in excellent Spanish. "If it had only depended on my will, I should have united myself to your chief several months ago."

Don Pablo pressed the hand of the chief.

"It only remains to me, caballero," pursued Don Antonio, "to present to you this officer."

"It is needless, caballero," quickly interrupted Don Pablo; "when the time arrives he will present himself, informing us of the motives which lead to his presence among us. Will you now be so good as to acquit yourself of the mission with which you are charged?"

"Senor caballero," pursued Don Antonio Zinozain, "the king, my master and yours, satisfied with the services you have rendered to his government since the commencement of this deplorable revolt, has deigned to confer on you the grade of colonel."

"I thank his Majesty for his kind solicitude for me," answered Don Pablo with a sardonic smile, "but the grade which he is good enough to confer upon me to-day, my sword has long ago conquered for me in the battle-field, where I have poured out my blood like water, to maintain the rights of his sacred Majesty."

"I know it, caballero, but it is not to this distinction only that his Majesty confines his favours."

"I am listening to you, senor."

"His Majesty has not only resolved to place under your immediate orders a body of two hundred men of regular cavalry, commanded by myself and other officers of the army, but also he authorises you, by a decree duly signed by him, and registered in the chancellor's office, to take for the corps placed under your orders the title of the Faithful Corps of Mountain Chasseurs, to hoist the royal standard quartered with Castille and Leon, and to place the Spanish cockade on the hats of your soldiers."

"His Majesty accords me these signal favours?" interrupted Don Pablo, with a joyous trembling in his voice.

"Moreover," impassively continued Don Antonio Zinozain, "his Majesty, considering that, up to the present time, guided solely by your devotion and your inviolable fidelity, you have sustained the war at your own risk and peril, dispensing and compromising your own fortune for his service, without hope of regaining these enormous disbursements—his Majesty, I say, whose high wisdom nothing escapes, has thought fit to give you a proof of his high satisfaction at this loyal conduct. He has consequently ordered that a sum of 100,000 piastres should be immediately placed at your disposal, in order to cover a part of your expenses. Moreover, he authorises you to take in advance, from all the war contributions that you shall impose on the towns which fall in your power, a tenth, of which you shall dispose as you think fit, as being entirely your own property, and this to the amount of another 100,000 piastres. His Majesty, besides, charges me, through his excellency the viceroy, his delegate and bearer of full powers, to assure you of his high satisfaction and of his desire not to limit to what he has done to-day the reward that he reckons to accord to you in the future."

"So," said Don Pablo, standing erect with a proud smile, "I am now really a war chief."

"His Majesty has so decided," answered Don Antonio.

"Vive Dios!" cried the partisan, with a menacing gesture; "his Majesty has done well, for I swear that of all those who now fight for his cause, I shall be the last to lay down arms. Never will I consent to treat with the rebels, and this oath I will keep, rayo de Cristo!"

The ferocious partisan had risen as he uttered this terrible imprecation; he had bowed his tall figure, thrown back his head, and placed his hand on the pommel of his sabre, whilst he cast at those around him a look of inexpressible arrogance and of savage energy.

The assembly were moved by these bold words; an electric shock appeared to run through them, and suddenly the whole room burst out into cries and exclamations; and then, the partisans warming by degrees through their own excitement, soon reached a paroxysm of joy and delirium.

Primitive natures are easy to draw out. These men, half savages, felt themselves recompensed by the honours accorded to their chief; they were proud of him, and

manifested their joy in their own way—that is to say, by bawling out and gesticulating.

The Spaniards themselves shared to a certain extent the general excitement. For a time, hope, nearly extinguished, arose as strongly in their hearts as on the first day, and they persuaded themselves into the belief in a success henceforth impossible.

In fact, at the point at which affairs had now arrived, this last attempt made by the Spaniards was but an act of foolish temerity, the result of which could not but be the prolongation, without any necessity, of a war of extermination between men of the same race, speaking the same language—an impious war, and a sacrilege which they ought, on the contrary, to have terminated as soon as possible, in order to spare bloodshed, instead of leaving America under the burden of general reprobation. But they were driven forward much more by the hatred of the colonists towards themselves, than by a sentiment of patriotism and nationality, that the latter did not yet understand, and which could not exist on a land which never, since its discovery, had been free.

Emile Gagnepain, the only spectator, apart from his reasons as to personal safety, completely disinterested in the question, could not, however, preserve his indifference, and assist coldly at this scene. He would even have ended by giving way to the general excitement, if the presence of the two Spanish officers—the first cause of all his misfortunes—had not restrained him, by inspiring a secret apprehension which he vainly tried to combat, but which, spite of all his efforts, continued with an obstinacy more and more disquieting to him.

Although the young Frenchman was prominently placed near Don Pablo Pincheyra's secretary, the Spaniards, from their entrance into the room, had not appeared to notice him. Not once had their eyes been directed to him, although they must have seen him. This obstinacy in feigning not to see him appeared the more extraordinary on the part of these two men, as they had no ostensible motive for avoiding him—at least he supposed so.

But Emile was only waiting for the interview to terminate to approach Captain Ortega, and ask him to explain his proceedings.

When the tumult began to subside, and the partisans had by degrees ceased their vociferations, Don Pablo claimed silence with a gesture, and prepared to take leave of the Spanish envoys, but Don Antonio Zinozain took a step in advance, and turning towards the Indian chief, who, up till then, had remained impassible and mute, listening to and observing all that was passing around him, though taking no part in it—

"Has my brother Marilaün nothing, then, to say to the great pale chief?" asked he.

"Yes," sharply answered the Arancan, "I have sworn this: Marilaün is a powerful Apo-Ulmen among the Aucas; a thousand warriors, when he demands them, follow his horse wherever he is pleased to conduct them; his guipos is obeyed on all the territory of the Puelches and the Huiliches; Marilaün loves the grandfather of the pale-faces; he will fight with his warriors to bring back to their duty the wandering sons of the Toqui of the whites. Five hundred Huiliche and Pueiche horsemen will range themselves near the Pincheyra when he orders it, for Pincheyra has always been a friend of the Aucas, and they consider him as a child of their tribe. I have said. Have I spoken well?"

"I thank you for your generous offer, chief," answered Don Pablo, "and I accept it with alacrity. Your warriors are brave indeed. The aid you offer me will be very useful to his Majesty. Now, caballeros, permit me to offer you hospitality. You are fatigued with a long journey.

"Pardon, senor colonel," said the Portuguese officer, who till then had kept

modestly on one side; "before you quit this room I will, if you permit me, acquit myself of my mission."

Notwithstanding his self-control, Don Pablo allowed a gesture of dissatisfaction to escape him.

"Perhaps it would be better, senor captain," he replied, in a conciliating tone, "to postpone the communication till a more fitting moment."

'Why so, senor colonel?" quickly answered the Portuguese; "the moment appears to me very suitable, and the spot where we are very appropriate."

"Perhaps so, senor, but it appears to me that this meeting has lasted too long already—it is prolonged beyond ordinary limits."

"So, senor colonel, you refuse to hear me?" drily pursued the officer.

"I do not say that," quickly answered Don Pablo; "do not misunderstand me, I beg. I address a simple observation to you in your own interest."

"If it is to be so, caballero, permit me, while thanking you for your courtesy, not to accept, at present at least, the gracious offer you make me."

Don Pablo threw a stealthy look on the French painter, and then answered with visible repugnance—

"Speak, then, senor, since you insist on it. Caballeros," added he, "you see that I am obliged to listen to what this caballero so ardently wishes to tell me; but I am glad to think that he will not detain you long."

"A few minutes only, senor."

"Be it so; we listen to you."

And the partisan resumed with a wearied air the seat that he had quitted. Although he put a good face upon it, an observer would have seen that he felt annoyed. The Frenchman, put on his guard by Tyro, and who, till this time, had seen nothing in what passed that concerned himself, did not allow this circumstance to escape him, slight as it was. Feigning entire indifference, he redoubled his attention, and imposed silence on Don Pablo's secretary, who—no doubt warned by his master—had suddenly felt inclined to talk with the young man, to whom he had previously not condescended to accord the least mark of politeness.

Thus rebuffed, Senor Vallejos felt constrained to subside again into the same silence that had previously distinguished him.

The Portuguese captain, taking advantage of the permission that had been given him, advanced a few paces, and after having ceremoniously bowed to Don Pablo, he commenced in a firm tone—

"Senor colonel," said he, "my name is Don Sebastiao Vianna; I have the honour to serve in the army of his Majesty the King of Portugal."

"I know it, caballero," drily answered Don Pablo; "come to the fact."

"I will do so, senor."

"Very well; continue."

"General Don Roque, Marquis de Castelmelhor, commander-in-chief of the second division of the corps of occupation of the Banda Orientale, of whom I have the honour to be aide-de-camp, sends me to you, Don Pablo Pincheyra, colonel commanding a squadron in the service of his Majesty the King of Spain, to beg you to explain yourself clearly and fully on the subject of the Marchioness of Castelmelhor, his wife, and Dona Eva de Castelmelhor, his daughter, whom you retain, against the law of nations, prisoners in your camp at Casa-Frama."

"Ah!" cried Don Pablo, with a gesture of denial, "such a supposition attacks my honour, senor captain."

"I do not speak on supposition, caballero," pursued Don Sebastiao, with firmness; "be so good as to answer me clearly. Are these ladies, or are they not, in your power."

"These ladies have claimed my assistance to escape from the rebels, who had made them prisoners."

"You retain them in your camp?"

Don Pablo turned with an air of vexation towards the Frenchman.

"It is true," at last he answered, "that these ladies are in my camp, but they enjoy perfect liberty."

"But on several occasions, when they have entreated you to allow them to rejoin General Castelmelhor, you have always objected to it on some vague pretext."

The situation became more and more embarrassing; the partisan felt rage boiling within him; he saw that he had been betrayed, that his conduct was known, that all denial was useless. The honourable distinction that had been so recently conferred upon him induced him to restrain himself, but he was not sufficiently master of himself to repress all manifestations of annoyance—there was in him too much of the partisan and the bandit for that.

"Vive Dios!" cried the partisan, with violence, "one would think that you are now making me undergo an examination!"

"It is so, in fact," proudly answered the officer.

"You forget, it appears to me, where you are."

"I forget nothing; I do my duty without troubling myself with the probable consequences."

"You are jesting, senor," pursued the partisan, with a wily smile; "you have nothing to fear from me or mine; we are soldiers."

Don Sebastiao smiled bitterly.

"I have no fear, senor," said he, "but that of not succeeding in accomplishing my mission; but I find that I am detaining you longer than I wished; I therefore briefly conclude. My general charges me to remind Don Pablo Pincheyra, a Spanish officer, that his honour, as a soldier, demands that he fail not in his word, loyally given, in retaining against their will two ladies who, of their own accord, have placed themselves under his safeguard. He, consequently, begs him to send them under my escort to the head-quarters of the Portuguese army. To Pincheyra, the partisan chief—a man to whom the words honour and loyalty are void of meaning, and who only seeks lucre—the Marquis of Castelmelhor offers a ransom of 4,000 piastres, that I am charged to pay on the surrender of the two ladies. Now I have finished, caballero; it is for you to tell me to whom I am now speaking—to the Spanish officer or to the Montonero."

After these words, uttered with a short and dry voice, the captain leant on his sabre, and waited.

Meanwhile, a lively agitation reigned in the room; the partisans whispered to each other, casting angry glances at the bold officer who dared to brave them in their own camp.

Don Pablo rose, calmed the tumult with a gesture, and, when silence was re-established, replied—

"Senor captain, I excuse the bitterness and exaggeration in what you have just said; you are ignorant of what has passed, and do not know how to acquit yourself of the mission with which you are charged. The tone you have thought proper to take would perhaps, with any other man than me, have serious consequences for you; but, I repeat, I excuse you in wrongly supposing me to have intentions which have always been far from my thoughts. These ladies have asked for my protection; I have accorded it them to the full. They now think they can do without it. Be it so; they are free; nothing prevents them leaving with you; they are not my prisoners. I have, then, no ransom to exact from them. My only reward will be to have been happy enough to have been of service to them in so perilous a position

That is the answer, senor captain, that I have to make to you. Will you inform his excellency the Marquis de Castelmelhor as to the manner in which I have acted with you, and assure him that I have been happy to render to these ladies the services that they have claimed from me on my honour as a soldier."

"This answer fills me with joy, caballero," resumed the officer. "Believe me that I thought it a duty to dispel from the mind of my general the prejudices which he had acquired against you."

"All is settled, then, senor. When do you leave?"

"As soon as I possibly can, senor."

"I understand; the Marquis de Castelmelhor must be impatient to see once more two persons who are so dear to him. But I venture to hope, then, that you will accept the invitation that I have made these caballeros, and share the hospitality that I offer them."

"With all my heart, caballero, only I should wish that you would permit me to see the ladies."

"I will myself conduct you to them, senor captain, as soon as you have taken some refreshments."

The captain bowed; a further persistence would have been in bad taste.

Don Pablo then left the room with his guests and his most intimate officers. On passing the French painter he did not say a word to him, but he looked at him sardonically.

"Hum!" murmured he to himself; "it is not so clear to me. I believe I must more than ever watch over these poor ladies."

And he left the room shaking his head for some time.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TOLDO.

On leaving the reception-room, Emile Gagnepain proceeded to the toldo occupied by the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter. In thus acting, the young man obeyed a presentiment which told him that in what had passed before him a melancholy farce had been played by Don Pablo, and that the readiness with which he had consented to part with them concealed some perfidy or other.

This presentiment had become so fixed on the young man's mind—it had become so real to him—that, although nothing arose to corroborate this suspicion of treachery, he was perfectly convinced of it, and would have asserted as much had occasion called for it.

Drawn, spite of himself, into a series of adventures very disagreeable to a man who, like him, had come to America to seek for that freedom and tranquillity of mind which his country, torn by factions, refused him, the young man had at last—as always happens—become interested in the anomalous position into which he had been thrown, with the feverish anxiety of a man who sees passing before him the scenes of a stirring drama. Moreover, without his taking any heed of it, a sentiment that he could not analyse had taken possession of his heart. This feeling had grown, unknown to himself, almost insensibly, and finally had acquired such force

that the young man—who began to be frightened at the novel situation in which he was suddenly placed—despaired of freeing himself from it. Like all natures not feeble, but careless—not daring seriously to question himself, and sound the gulf which had thus opened in his heart—he allowed himself carelessly to be drifted by the current which carried him along, enjoying the present without caring for the future, and assuring himself that when the catastrophe arrived it would be time enough to face the danger and to take his stand.

He had taken but a few steps in the camp when, turning his head, he perceived Don Santiago Pincheyra at a few paces behind him.

The Montonero was walking carelessly, his arms behind his back, with a vague look, whistling a sombajueca—in a word, all the appearance of a man taking a lounging walk. But the painter was not deceived: he knew that Don Pablo, engaged with his guests, towards whom he was obliged to do the honours of the camp, had deputed his brother to watch his movements.

The young man by degrees slackened his pace unaffectedly, and, turning suddenly on his heel, found himself face to face with Don Santiago.

"Eh!" said he, "what a charming surprise, senor! You have then left your brother, Don Pablo."

"As you see, senor," answered the other.

"And you are, no doubt, taking a walk?"

"Upon my word, yes; between ourselves, dear senor, these formal receptions weary me."

"Carai, I know it!" said the Frenchman. "Well, I am delighted that you have succeeded in disengaging yourself from these proud and haughty strangers. It is very fortunate for me that you are free. I confess I scarcely reckoned on the pleasure of meeting you."

"You were seeking me, then?" said Don Santiago.

"Certainly, I was looking for you."

"Ah! why were you seeking me, then?"

"Well, dear senor, as you are one of my best friends, I intended to ask a service of you."

"To ask a service of me—me?"

"Parblieu! who else? Except your brother, Don Pablo, and you, I do not know any one at Casa-Frama."

"It is true; you are a forastero stranger."

"Alas! yes—all that there is left of a forastero."

"What is the service?" asked the Montonero.

"This is the affair," answered the latter with imperturbable coolness; "only I beg you to keep the secret, for it concerns other persons."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Don Santiago.

"Yes," pursued the young man, nodding his head affirmatively, "you promise to keep it secret."

"On my honour."

"Thank you, I am satisfied. I confess, then, that I begin to be horribly bored at Casa-Frama."

"I can understand that," answered the Montonero.

"I wish to leave, but first, there are the two ladies whom you know."

"That is true," said he with a smile.

"You do not understand me."

"How so?"

"Why, you appear to suppose that I wish to remain with them, whereas it is they who persistently demand that I stay with them."

The Montonero cast a stealthy and suspicious look on his companion, but the Frenchman was on his guard; his face was inexpressive as marble.

"Good, continue," said he, after a pause.

"You know that I have assisted at the interview."

"Parbleu! seeing that it was I who conducted you there. You were seated near the secretary."

"Well, these ladies are on the point of quitting Casa-Frama. Don Pabio consents to their departure."

"You wish to leave with them?"

"You have not guessed it; I should like to leave, it is true, but not with them, since they go under the escort of Spanish officers."

"Just so."

"Then they will no longer have any pretext for preventing me quitting them."

"That is true; then—"

"Then I desire that you get your brother to grant me a safe-conduct to traverse your lines and regain as quickly as possible Tucuman."

"Is it really to return to Tucuman that you want a safe-conduct?"

"For what reason should it be, then?"

"I do not know; but my brother——"

"Your brother!" suggested the young man.

"Nothing—I made a mistake; do not attach to what I say to you a sense which cannot be true."

"Are there any difficulties in your granting me the safe-conduct?"

"I do not see any; however, I should not dare to do so without informing my brother."

"Do not distress yourself about that; I have no intention of leaving the camp without his authority."

"You are then in a hurry to depart?"

"To a certain extent; it would be better, I think, if I could go away without seeing these ladies, and before them. In this way I should avoid the request they would not fail to make, to accompany them."

"That would indeed be better."

"Then come and find your brother."

"Be it so."

They proceeded towards the toldo of Don Pablo; but about half-way the Frenchman stopped.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Don Santiago.

"I am thinking there is no occasion for us to go together; you will arrange this matter much better than me. While you go there I will prepare everything for my departure."

The young man spoke with such decided good-nature, that Don Santiago, despite all his cleverness, was deceived.

"Very good," said he; "while I see my brother, make your preparations."

"However, if you prefer it, perhaps it would be better for me to accompany you?"

"No, no, it is needless."

"I thank you in advance."

The two men shook hands and separated, Don Santiago proceeding towards his brother's house, which was also his own, and the Frenchman apparently going in the direction of the habitation which had been assigned to him; but as soon as the partisan had turned the corner of the nearest street, Emile, having assured himself that no new spy was dogging his steps, immediately changed his route, and took that towards the dwelling of the two ladies.

Pincheyra had lodged his captives in an isolated toldo at one of the extremities of the camp—a toldo with its back to an almost perpendicular mountain, and which for that reason assured him against the probabilities of their flight. This toldo was divided into several compartments; it was clean and furnished with all the luxury that the locality admitted.

Two Indian women had been attached by the partisan to the service of the ladies, apparently as servants, but in reality to watch them and render him an account of what they said and did; for, notwithstanding all the denials of Don Pablo, the marchioness and her daughter, although treated with the greatest respect, were really prisoners.

It was only with great caution and by stealth that the young painter succeeded in seeing them.

The domestics incessantly hovered round their mistresses, ferreting, listening, and watching; and if by chance they went away, the sister of Don Santiago, who pretended to manifest a lively friendship for the strangers, came and installed herself near them unceremoniously, and remained there nearly all the day, fatiguing them with studied caresses and lying exhibitions of a friendship which they perfectly knew was false.

However, thanks to Tyro, whose devotion did not slacken, and who knew well how to cope with the two Indian women, Emile had succeeded in pretty well escaping from them. But to-day, after having during the morning made a long visit to the ladies, the sister had withdrawn, in order to assist at the repast that her brother gave to the officers.

The marchioness and her daughter were then, for some time at least, delivered from their spies, mistresses of their time, and free to a certain extent to converse with the only friend who had not abandoned them, without fear of their words being repeated to the man who had so disgracefully betrayed, in their case, the laws of hospitality.

At a few paces from the toldo, the young man came across Tyro, who, without speaking, made him understand by mute signs, that the ladies were alone.

The young man entered.

The marchioness and her daughter, sitting sadly by each other's side, were reading a prayer-book.

At the sound which Emile made in crossing the threshold of the door, they quickly raised their heads.

"Ah!" exclaimed the marchioness, whose countenance immediately brightened up, "it is you at last."

"Excuse me, madame," he answered, "I can but very rarely come to see you."

"I know it. Like us, you are watched and exposed to suspicion. Alas! we have only escaped the revolutionists to fall into the hands of men more cruel still."

"Have you to complain of the proceedings of Don Pablo Pincheyra, or of any of his people, madame?"

"Oh!" answered she, with a significant smile, "Don Pablo is polite—too polite, perhaps, for me! Oh! mon Dieu! what have I done to be thus exposed to his persecutions?"

"Have you seen my servant this morning, madame?"

"Is it of Tyro that you speak?"

"Yes, of him, madame."

"I have seen him for a moment."

"Has he said nothing to you?"

"Very little; he announced to me your visit, adding that no doubt you would have important news to communicate to me."

"I have indeed, madame, important news to announce to you, but I do not know how to do so."

"How so?" cried Dona Eva; "do you fear to afflict us, Senor Don Emile?"

"I fear, on the contrary, senora, to raise in your heart a hope which may not be realised."

"What do you mean? Speak, senor, in the name of heaven," quickly interrupted the marchioness.

"This morning, madame, several strangers entered Casa-Frama."

"I know it, caballero. It is to that circumstance that I owe not having near me the body-guard of a cornet that it has been thought I ought to have—that is to say, the sister of Don Pablo Pincheyra."

"Do you know these strangers, madame?"

"Your question surprises me, caballero. Since my arrival here, you know that I have scarcely been permitted to take a few steps out."

"Excuse me, madame; I will explain. Have you heard speak of Don Sebastiao Vianna?"

"Yes, yes," cried Dona Eva, clapping her hands with joy; "Don Sebastiao is one of the aides-de-camp of my father."

The countenance of the young man clouded.

"So you are sure you know him?" pursued he.

"Certainly," answered the marchioness; "how can my daughter and I fail to know a man who is our distant relation, and who has stood godfather to my daughter?"

"Then, madame, I am deceived, and the news I bring you is really good news."

"How is that?"

"Among the strangers who have arrived this morning at Casa-Frama, one of them is charged with claiming your being immediately set at liberty, on the part of the Marquis de Castelmelhor. This stranger is named Don Sebastiao Vianna, wears the costume of a Portuguese officer, and is, he says, aide-de-camp of General the Marquis de Castelmelhor. I ought to avow that in this matter Don Pablo Pincheyra has conducted himself as a true caballero. After having denied that you were his prisoners, he nobly refused the sum proposed for your ransom, and engaged to place you to-day in the hands of Don Sebastiao."

There was a minute's silence. The marchioness was pale, her eyebrows knitted under the influence of internal emotion, and her fixed look denoted an intense feeling, which she repressed with difficulty. Dona Eva, on the contrary, brightened up; the hope of liberty illuminated her features with a halo of happiness.

The young man looked at the marchioness without understanding this emotion, the cause of which he vainly sought. At last she said:

"Are you really certain, caballero," said she, "that the officer of whom you speak is Don Sebastiao?"

"Perfectly, senora. I have several times heard him called in my presence; besides, it would be quite impossible for me to invent a name that I have never before to-day heard pronounced."

"It is true; and yet what you tell me is so extraordinary, that I confess I do not dare to believe it."

"Oh, my mother," cried Don Eva, in a tone of reproach, "Don Sebastiao Vianna, the most loyal man——"

"What assures you, my daughter," quickly interrupted the marchioness, "that this man is really Don Sebastiao."

"Oh, madame," said the young man.

"Caballero, Don Sebastiao was, scarcely two months ago, in Europe," answered the marchioness.

This remark fell like a thunderbolt in the midst of the conversation, and suddenly chilled the hope in the heart of the young girl.

At the same moment a whistle sounded from without.

"Tyro warns me," said Emile, "that some one comes this way; I can stay no longer. Whatever happens, do not abandon yourself to despair, feign to accept, whatever they are, the propositions that will be made to you; anything is preferable to you than to remain longer here. I also will watch. I shall soon see you again --courage! Reckon on me."

And without waiting for the answer that the two ladies were doubtless preparing to make, the young man darted into the street.

Tyro, who was watching for his appearance, seized him quickly by the arm.

"Look!" said he.

The painter leant forward cautiously, and perceived Don Pablo Pincheyra, his sister, the Portuguese officer, and three or four other persons, who were going towards the habitation of the ladies.

"Hum!" he exclaimed; "it was time."

"Is it not? But I was watching, happily."

"Come, Tyro, let us return to my place. Don Santiago must expect me."

"You have given me a rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"Well, have I deceived you, my friend?"

"No, certainly; what I have seen has surpassed my expectation. But who, then, is this Don Sebastiao?"

The guaranis answered by a sneer of bad omen.

"There is something, is there not?" asked Emile, with uneasiness.

"With the Pincheyras there is always something, my friend," pursued the Indian, in a low voice; "but here we are at your toldo; be prudent."

"Inform the gauchos that probably we shall set out to-day; prepare all, so that we may be ready."

"We are going to leave?"

"I hope so."

"Oh, then, all is not yet lost."

They entered the toldo; it was deserted; Don Santiago had not yet appeared.

Whilst Tyro went to tell the gauchos to get ready, to saddle their horses, and to bring the baggage-mules from the corral, the young man proceeded, with feverish rapidity, to make his preparations.

So when half-an-hour later Don Santiago entered the toldo, the suspicious look that he threw around him did not reveal anything which could give rise to a suspicion that the Frenchman had not commenced his task immediately after having quitted him.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the young man on seeing him; "welcome, Don Santiago, especially if you bring my safe-conduct."

"I bring it you," answered Don Santiage.

"Pardieu! it must be confessed that you are a valuable friend; Don Pablo has not made any difficulties?"

"None."

"Well, he is really very obliging to me; so I can set out?"

"Yes, on two conditions."

"Ah! there are conditions! And what are they?"

"The first is, that you will set out immediately, and without seeing any one," he added.

"My people?"

"You shall take them with you; what do you think that we should do with them here?"

"You are right; well, what is the second condition? if it is like the first, I doubt not that I shall accept it without hesitation."

"Here it is: Don Pablo desires that I escort you for a few leagues. Does that displease you?"

"Me!" answered Emile, laughing; "why should it be displeasing to me? I am, on the contrary, very grateful to your brother. He, no doubt, fears that I should wander in the mazes of these mountains," added he.

"I do not know; I obey—that is all."

"That is right, and particularly logical."

"So you accept these two conditions?"

"With gratitude."

"Then we will set out when you like."

"I would say immediately, but, unfortunately, I am obliged to wait for my horses, which have not yet come from the corral."

"It is not yet late, so there is no time lost."

"Now that we are agreed, suppose we take a drop of brandy?"

"Upon my word I shall be delighted, senor."

The Frenchman took a bottle and poured out some brandy into two horn goblets.

"To your health!" said he, drinking.

"To your pleasant journey," answered Don Santiago.

"Thank you."

A sound of horses was heard from without.

"Here are your animals."

"Then we shall be ready in a few minutes. If you like, while we are loading, inform the men who are to accompany you."

"They have been told; they are waiting for us in the intrenchments."

Tyro and the gauchos then proceeded, aided by Emile and Don Santiago, to load the two mules and to saddle the horses.

The Frenchman, accustomed to travel in these countries, had very little luggage; he never carried with him anything but what was indispensable.

Half an hour afterwards the caravan started out at a gentle pace, accompanied by Don Santiago, who followed it on foot, smoking his cigarette, and talking with the young man in a friendly way.

As the Montonero had said, a dozen horsemen were waiting at the intrenchments.

The Pincheyra mounted his horse, gave the order of departure; the keepers opened the barriers, and the little troop quitted the camp in good order.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE MOUNTAIN.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon whem Emile Gagnepain left the camp Notwithstanding the rather suspicious escort by which he was accompanied, it was with a sigh of satisfaction that the young man at last saw himself clear of this repair of bandits, from which at one time he feared he should never again set out.

The route which the little caravan followed was most picturesque and varied. A narrow path wound on the side of the mountains, almost always close to unfathomable precipices, from the base of which arose mysterious murmurs produced by invisible waters. Sometimes a bridge formed by two trunks of trees thrown across a chasm, which suddenly interrupted the route, was crossed, as if in play, by horses and mules a long time accustomed to walk over routes more perilous still.

Obliged to travel one behind the other, owing to the narrowness of the scarcely-traced path which they were pursuing, the travellers could not talk to each other; it was scarcely possible for them to exchange a few words, and they were constrained to abandon themselves to their own thoughts, or to charm the weariness of the journey by singing or whistling. It was in thus examining the abrupt and wild landscape by which he was surrounded that the young man formed a good idea of the formidable and almost impregnable position chosen by the partisan for his head-quarters, and the great influence that this position must give him over the dismayed inhabitants of the plain. He shuddered as he thought of the imprudence he had committed in allowing himself to be taken to this fortress which, like the infernal circles of Dante, was by nature surrounded by impassable intrenchments, and which never gave up the prey that had once been drawn into it. A crowd of melancholy stories of young girls, who had been carried away and had disappeared, recurred to his mind, and, by a strange reaction of thought, he experienced a kind of retrospective turn—if we may be allowed the expression—in thinking of the terrible dangers that he had run in the midst of these lawless bandits, by whom, in many instances, the law of nations—sacred among all civilised peoples—had not been respected.

Then, from reflection to reflection—by a very natural gradation—his mind fixed itself on the ladies whom he had left without support or protection in the midst of these men. Although he had only left them with the design of attempting a last effort for their deliverance, his conscience reproached him for having abandoned them; for, notwithstanding the absolute impossibility of his being useful to them at Casa-Frama, he was convinced that his presence was a check upon the Pincheyras, and that before him none of them would have dared to have subjected the captives to any brutal act.

A prey to these painful thoughts, he felt his spirits sadden by degrees, and the joy that he had at first experienced on seeing himself unexpectedly at liberty gave place to the despondency which several times already had seized on him, and had destroyed his energy.

Emile was drawn from his reflections by the voice of Don Santiago, which suddenly fell upon his ear.

The young man quickly raised his head, and looked round him like a man suddenly awakened.

The landscape had completely changed. The path had by degrees become broader, and had assumed the appearance of a regular route; the mountains were

lower; their sides were now covered with verdant forests, the leafy summits of which were tinted with all the colours of the rainbow by the mild rays of the setting sun. The caravan emerged at this moment into a rather extensive plain, surrounded by thick shubbery and traversed by a narrow stream, the capricious meanderings of which were lost here and there in the midst of high and thick grass.

"What do you want?" asked the Frenchman, who, susceptible, like all artists, had become absorbed, unknown to himself by the influence of this majestic landscape, and felt gaiety replace the sadness which had for a long time oppressed him; "what do you want now, Don Santiago?"

"The devil!" exclaimed the latter; "it is fortunate that you have at last consented to answer me. For more than a quarter of an hour I have been speaking to you without getting a word out of you. It seems as if you had been sound asleep, companion."

"Pardon me, senor, I was not asleep; I was reflecting, which is often much about the same."

"Demonio! I will not quibble about that; but as you now consent to listen to me, will you be so good as to answer me?"

"I am quite agreeable; but that I may do so, it will be necessary, my dear Don Santiago, to repeat your question, of which I assure you I have not heard a word."

"I will do so, although, without exaggeration, I have done so at least ten times to no purpose."

"I have already begged you to excuse me."

"I know it, and I therefore will not be offended. This is what I have to say: it is at least six o'clock; the sun is setting amidst coppery clouds of the worst kind; I fear a storm to-night."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed the young man; "are you sure of that?"

"I have too much acquaintance with these mountains to be deceived."

"Hum! and what do you intend to do?"

"That is what I ask; that concerns you as much as me, I suppose."

"Just so—even more, since it is for my sake that you have agreed to accompany me. Well, what is your advice?"

"That is what I call speaking, and your answer is none the worse for making me wait for it. My advice, then, would be to stop here, place ourselves under shelter from the hurricane, and camp for the night."

"I think that you are right, and that it would be folly, under circumstances like these, considering the advanced hour, to persist in going further."

"Especially as it would be almost impossible for us to reach as good a refuge as this."

"Let us stop, then, without further discussion, and let us hasten to make our encampment."

"Well, dear senor, as it is to be so, alight and let us unload the mules."

"Very good," said the young man, leaping from his horse.

Don Santiago had spoken truly. The sun was setting, drowned in waves of dull clouds; the evening breeze was rising with some force; the birds wheeled in large circles, uttering discordant cries—everything, in fact, foretold one of those terrible hurricanes called temporales, the violence of which is so great that the country over which they wreak their vengeance is in a few minutes completely changed and thrown into disorder, as if an earthquake had shattered it.

The painter had several times, since his arrival in America, been in a position to witness the terrifying spectacle of these frightful convulsions of nature. Knowing the inconvenience of the danger then, he hastened to prepare everything. The baggage, piled together in the centre of the valley, not far from the stream, formed a

solid rampart against the greatest fury of the wind; the horses were left free and abandoned to that infallible instinct with which Providence has endowed them, and which in giving them a foreknowledge of the danger, suggests to them the means of escaping from it. Then, in a hole dug in haste, they lit the fire for cooking the slices of charqui, or wild bull's flesh dried in the sun, destined, with the hari a tostada and a little queso of goat's flesh, for the evening meal. The water from the brook served to satisfy the thirst of the travellers, for, except Don Santiago and the painter, who were each provided with a large bota of white brandy, they did not carry with them either wine or liqueurs; but this forgetfulness, if it really was such, was of little importance for men of such great frugality as the Hispano-Americans—people who live, so to speak, on nothing, and whose hunger or thirst is appeased by the first thing which offers itself.

The meal was what it should be among men who expect from one moment to another to see a terrible and inevitable danger fall upon them—that is to say, sorrowful and silent. Each ate in haste, without holding conversation with his neighbour; then, hunger satisfied and the cigarette lighted, the travellers, without even wishing good night to each other, enveloped themselves in their fresadas and their pellones, and tried to sleep with that placid resignation which forms the foundation of the character of the creoles, and makes them accept without useless murmurs the frequently disastrous consequences of the nomadic life to which they are condemned.

Soon, with the exception of the three or four sentinels placed on the outskirts of the encampment, in order to guard against the approach of wild beasts, and the two chiefs of the caravan—that is to say, Don Santiago and Emile—all were plunged into deep sleep.

The Pincheyra seemed thoughtful; he smoked his cigarette, his back leaning on a trunk of a tree, and his eyes directed straight forward, without looking on any object. The Frenchman, on the contrary, more wakeful and more gay than ever, was humming a tune and amusing himself by digging with the point of a knife a hole in which he piled some dry wood, evidently intending to light a watch-fire to warm his feet, when he felt inclined to go to sleep.

"Eh! Don Santiago," said he at last, addressing Pincheyra, and touching him lightly on the shoulder, "what are you thinking of now? Is it that you are not going to try and sleep for a couple of hours?"

The Chilian shook his head without answering.

"What does it matter?" pursued the young man, persistently—"you, who a little while ago reproached me for my melancholy—you seem to have inherited it, upon my word."

"Do you take me for a woman?" answered he, at last, in a surly tone; "what matters to me the state of the sky? Am I not a child of the mountains, accustomed from my infancy to brave the most terrible storms?"

"But, then, what is it that distresses you?"

"What is it? Do you wish to know?"

"Pardieu! since I ask it."

Don Santiago shook his head, threw around him a suspicious look, and then at last made up his mind to speak in a low and almost indistinct voice, as if he feared to be heard, although all his companions were asleep at too great a distance for the sound of his voice to reach them.

"I have," said he, "one thing that vexes me."

"You, Don Santiago—you astonish me; can it be that you are on bad terms with Don Pablo?"

"My brother, it is true, has something to do with the affair, but with him per-

sonally I have no misunderstanding—at least, I believe so, for with him one never knows how to act; no, it is only on your account that I am chagrined just now."

"On my account!" cried the young man, with surprise, "I confess I do not understand you."

"Speak lower; there is no occasion for our companions to hear what we say. Look you, Don Emile, I wish to be frank with you. We are about to separate, perhaps never to see one another again—and I hope, for your sake, it may be so. I wish our parting to be friendly, and that you should not entertain any ill-feeling against me."

"I assure you, Don Santiago——"

"I know what I say," interrupted he, with some vivacity; "you have rendered me a great service. I cannot deny that, to a certain extent, I owe my life to you, for when I met you in the cavern of the rancho my position was almost desperate; well, I have not, in appearance, conducted myself towards you as I ought to have done. I engaged myself to shelter you and yours from the danger which threatened you, and I have conducted you to Casa-Frama, when I ought, on the contrary, to have taken you in quite an opposite direction. I know that I have acted badly in this respect, and you have a right to entertain ill-feeling to me. But I was not free to do otherwise. I was forced to obey a will stronger than my own—the will of my brother—whom no one has ever dared to resist. Now, I acknowledge my fault, and I wish as much as possible to repair the evil I have done, and that I have allowed to be done."

"That is speaking like a caballero, Don Santiago. Be assured that, come what may, I shall be pleased at what you tell me at this moment; but, since you have begun so well, do not leave me any longer in painful doubt; answer me sincerely, will you?"

"Yes, as far as it depends on me."

"The ladies that I have been obliged to abandon, do they run any danger at present?"

"I think so."

"On the part of your brother?"

"Yes, on my brother's part, and others' also. These two strangers have implacable enemies."

"Poor women!" murmured the young man, sighing; "they will not, then, leave the camp?"

"Yes; to-morrow, at sunrise, they will quit, escorted by the officer."

"Do you know that officer?"

"A little."

"Who is he?"

"That I cannot say; I have sworn not to reveal it to any one."

The Frenchman saw that he must not persist.

"What route will they take?" asked he.

"That which we are following."

"And they are going——"

"Towards the Brazilian frontier."

"So they will rejoin General Castelmelhor?"

The Pincheyra shook his head negatively.

"Then why take this direction?"

"I do not know."

"And, nevertheless, you think that danger threatens them?"

"Terrible."

"Of what kind?"

"I do not know."

The young man stamped his foot with vexation. These continual reticences on the part of the partisan disquieted him more than the truth, so frightful that he kept watching out to hear it.

"So," pursued he, after a pause, "supposing I remain here for some time I shall see them."

"There is no doubt of it."

"What do you advise?"

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Nothing; I am not, like you, in love with Dona Eva," said he, with a certain tinge of raillery, which made the young man start.

"In love with Dona Eva!"—cried he—"I?"

"What other motive could induce you, with all the chances against you, to risk your life to save her, if it were not so?"

"The young man did not answer. A light flashed suddenly on his mind. That secret, which he had hid from himself, others knew it; and when he did not dare to question himself on this insensate love which burned within him, the certainty of its existence was discovered even by strangers.

"Oh!" stammered he at last; "Don Santiago, do you think me capable of such a folly?"

"I do not know if it is a folly to love when one is young and ardent as you are," coldly answered the Pincheyra. "I have never loved but my horse and my gun; but I know well that the love of two young and handsome beings is a law of nature, and that I do not see what reason you should have to try and escape from it. I do not blame you or approve you; I state a fact—that is all."

The young painter was astonished to hear a man speak thus who, up to that time, he had supposed to be endowed with a very mode ate share of intelligence, and all whose aspirations seemed to him directed towards war and piliage. This half savage, uttering with so careless an air sentiments so humanely philosophic, seemed to him an incomprehensible phenomenon.

The Pincheyra, without appearing to notice the impression he had produced on his companion, continued quietly—

"The officer who escorts these ladies not only is ignorant of your love for the younger of the two ladies, but he is not even aware that you know them. For particular and personal reasons, my brother has thought proper to keep silence on that subject. I give you this information, the correctness of which I guarantee, because it will be of service to you in case of need."

"Now, it is too late."

"Don Emile, know this—that immediately after our conversation my companions and I will withdraw, for our mission is terminated; and if I have remained so long with you, it is because I decided to tell you certain things."

"I thank you for it."

"Well, I am certain that you will not quit this place without having tried, not only to see these ladies again, but to carry them off from those who have them in charge—which, for that matter, would not be impossible, since they will be but a dozen at the most. I wish you good fortune from the bottom of my heart, for I like you. But take my advice—act with prudence; cunning has united more bonds than force has broken. Follow the counsel that I give you, and I hope that you will find it good. Now we must separate; I have, if not repaired, at least lessened the serious consequences of the fault I have been obliged to commit. Let us part friends. The only hope that I have is, that we shall never see one another again."

"What! you are going to set out in the midst of darkness when we are threatened with a storm!"

"It must be, Don Emile. I am expected there. My brother is preparing an important expedition, in which I ought, and wish, to assist. As to the storm, it will not burst for two or three hours, and, terrible as it may be, it is too old an acquaintance for me not to know how to defend myself from it. Adieu, then, and once more—good fortune! Whatever happens, silence on what I have said! Now, wrap yourself in your poncho, and feign to sleep till I have given the signal for my men to depart."

The young man followed the counsel which had been given to him; he rolled himself in his mantle and stretched himself on the ground.

When Don Santiago was assured that nothing would arouse suspicion as to the conversation which had just taken place, he rose, stretched his limbs to freshen himself up, and, taking a whistle suspended to his neck by a little silver chain, he gave a shrill and prolonged call with it.

The horsemen immediately raised their heads.

"Come, boys!" cried the Pincheyra, in a loud voice, "up and saddle your horses; we return to Casa-Frama."

"What! you leave us at this hour, Senor Don Santiago?" asked the young man, feigning to be awakened by the sound of the whistle.

"It must be so, senor," answered he; "our escort is not necessary to you, and we have a long journey to make if we would reach Casa-Frama before sunrise."

Meanwhile, the Pincheyras had with alacrity obeyed the order which they had received; they had risen and had proceeded to get ready and saddle their horses.

By accident apparently, but no doubt as planned by Don Santiago, the sentinels who were charged with watching over the common safety were the two gauchos and the guaranis, so that he was certain that the secret of his conversation with the Frenchman would not transpire.

In a few minutes the horsemen were in the saddles. The Pincheyra put himself at their head, and, turning towards Emile, making him a friendly salute with the hand—

"Adieu, senor, and good fortune!" he said, significantly.

The painter returned his cordial salute, and the little troop set out. It soon disappeared at the turn of the path. The sound of its steps gradually lessened, and before long had ceased altogether. When silence was completely re-established, Emile made a sign to his companions.

"Now that we are alone, senores," he said, "let us talk, for affairs are serious. Tyro, light the fire; we will hold council in the Indian fashion."

The guaranis gathered some dry wood, piled it carefully, struck a light, and soon a slight column of flame rose brightly in the air.

A deathlike silence reigned in the valley; the breeze had died away; there was not a sound in the air; the sky, black as ink, had not a single star; nature appeared to be gathering all her powers for a terrible strife of the elements; from the unexplored depths of the chasms dull and mysterious sounds sometimes rose, mingling at intervals with the low growl of beasts going to seek water.

The four men crouched round the fire, lit their cigarettes, and the young man talked to them, telling them what he thought advisable of the conversation which had taken place between him and Don Santiago.

"Now," added he, "answer me frankly; can I count on you for all that I think proper to do?"

"Yes," answered they with one voice.

"Whatever happens?"

"Whatever happens."

"Well, I shall not be ungrateful; the reward shall equal the services; now, if you have any observations to submit, I am ready to hear them. Speak freely, and without reservation."

The gauchos, peculiarly men of action, and not by nature great talkers, contented themselves by saying that when the moment for action arrived they would be ready—that they had nothing to say on the mode of proceeding—that that did not concern them.

"That is right," said Tyro. "Go to sleep, my braves, and leave us—the senor, our master, and I, agree on what is best to be done."

The gauchos did not require this to be repeated; they rose and proceeded to stretch themselves amongst the baggage: a few minutes later, and they were sound asleep.

Emile and the guaranis, who alone were awake, held a long and serious conversation, and arranged a plan which it is needless to state here.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PARTISAN.

We must now return to the Guaycurus chiefs, whom we left at the moment when, following Don Zeno Cabral, they entered a cavern where the Montonero—at least according to the words he made use of in accosting them—appeared to have given a rendezvous to the Congonar.

This cavern—the entry of which, without knowing it well, it was impossible to distinguish from without, by reason of the conformation of the ground of which it formed the centre, and of the difficulty with which it was reached—was vast and perfectly light, on account of a number of almost imperceptible fissures which allowed the light to penetrate at the same time that it renewed the air. At the bottom and on the sides several galleries opened, which were lost under the mountain at probably very great distances. The spot where the partisans stopped, that is to say, at a few steps from the opening, contained several seats formed by blocks of oak awkwardly squared, and two or three masses of dried leaves, serving probably for beds to those who came to seek a temporary refuge in this place.

In the centre of the cavern a great fire was lighted. Over this fire, suspended by a chain from three stakes placed triangularly, was boiling an iron pot, while a quarter of guanaco, spitted on a ramrod fixed in the ground, was roasting very gently; some potatoes were cooking under the cinders, and several bullock-horn cups containing some harina tostada were placed near seats on the ground. The arms of Zeno Cabral were leaning against one of the walls of the cavern; he had only kept his knife in his right pocket.

"Senores," said the partisan with a courteous gesture, "permit me to offer you the poor hospitality that the circumstances in which we are compel me to give you. Before anything else we will eat and drink together to establish confidence between us, and to remove all suspicion of treason."

These words were spoken in Portuguese; the captains answered in the same lan-

guage, and sat, after the example of their Amphytrion, on the seats prepared for them.

Zeno Cabral then unhooked the pot and served with uncommon skill and vivacity, in the couis which he presented to his guests, some tocino, choriajo, and charqui, seasoned with camotes and aji, which form the national dish of these countries.

The meal commenced; the chiefs vigorously attacked the dishes placed before them, helping themselves with their knives instead of forks, and drinking in turn water slightly dashed with brandy to remove its brackishness.

The Indians do not speak as they eat, so their meals are generally short. After the charqui, it was the turn for the guanaco; then the harina tostada was taken, diluted with warm water, and at last Zeno Cabral made the maté and offered it to his guests.

When the three personages had lighted their maize-straw cigarettes, Zeno Cabral at last spoke.

"I ought to apologise to you, Senor Captain," said he in Portuguese to Gueyma, "for the kind of surprise by means of which I have obtained an interview with you; the Congonar, of whom I have for a long time had the honour of being a friend, has induced me to act as I have done; if a fault has been committed, it is on him that the blame ought to rest."

"What the Congonar does is always right," answered the chief, smiling; "he is my father, since it is to him that I owe what I am; I have not to blame him then, convinced that very important reasons, and which no doubt will afterwards be explained to me, prevented him from acting otherwise."

"Gueyma has well spoken, as usual," said the Congonar; "wisdom dwells with him; the white chief will not be long in giving motives for his conduct."

"That is what I am immediately going to do, if the captains will be so good as to lend me their attention," pursued Zeno Cabral.

"Let my father speak, our ears are opened."

The partisan collected himself for two or three minutes, and then commenced in these terms:

"My brothers, the Guaycurus warriors, deceived by the lying words of a white, have consented to form an alliance with him, and to follow him into this country, to aid him in fighting other whites, who have never done evil to my brothers. But while the warriors entered on the path of war, and abandoned their hunting territories, under the safeguard of the honour of their new allies, the latter invaded, to the contempt of sworn faith, their territories, and tried to establish themselves there. This iniquitous project would probably have succeeded, considering the absence of the brave warriors of the tribe, if a friend of the Guaycurus, disgusted with that infamous action, had not warned Tarou-Niom, the great captain of the Guaycurus, to put himself on his guard, and had not contracted an offensive and defensive alliance with Emavidi-Chaime, the great chief of the Payagoas, to oppose the attacks of the common enemy."

Notwithstanding the command of countenance of which the Indians boast in the most important circumstances, Gueyma, on learning this news, so decisively and coldly uttered, could not contain himself. His eyebrows knitted, his nostrils dilated like those of a wild beast; he bounded on his feet, and violently clapping his hands:

"My brother, the pale chief, has proofs of what he states, has he not?" he cried, with a tone of sudden menace.

"I have," simply answered Zeno Cabral.

"Good, then he will give them to me."

"I will give them to the captain."

"But there is another thing I wish to know."

"What does my brother wish to know?"

"Who is the friend of the Guaycurus who has warned them of the horrible treason which is plotted against them?"

"What good will it be to tell my brother that?"

"Because, as I know my enemies, I wish to know my friends."

Zeno Cabral bowed.

"It is I," said he.

Gueyma looked at him a moment with a strange earnestness, as if he had wished to read his most secret thoughts.

"It is good," said he, at last; "what my brother says must be true. Gueyma thanks him, and offers him his hand."

"I accept it with alacrity, for I have a long time loved the captain," answered the partisan.

"Now, what are the proofs that my brother will give me?"

Zeno Cabral searched under his poncho and drew out a guipos; the latter quickly seized it, and immediately proceeded to decipher it with the same rapidity that a European reads a letter.

Little by little the features of the chief resumed their marble rigidity; then, after having completely deciphered the guipos, he handed it to the Congonar, and, turning towards Zeno Cabral, who followed all his movements with secret anxiety:

"Now, I know the insult that has been offered me," said he, coldly, "my brother will give me, no doubt, the means of avenging myself."

"Perhaps I shall succeed," answered the partisan.

"Why have a doubt on the lips when certainty is in the heart?" pursued Gueyma.

"What does the captain mean?"

"I mean that no one with the simple design of being agreeable to a man whom he does not know, would do as my brother has done."

"I know the captain better than he thinks."

"It is possible; I admit that; but it is not the less evident to me that my brother the pale chief, had a design in acting as he has done. It is that design that Gueyma wishes to know."

"If my brother were to suppose that I also have to avenge myself on the man who has insulted him, and that for this vengeance to be more sure and striking, I need the aid of my brother—would he refuse me?"

"No, certainly, if instead of being a supposition it was a reality."

"The captain promises me?"

"I promise it."

"Well, the suspicions of the chief are just. Notwithstanding the lively and sincere friendship that I have for him, obliged for the present to occupy myself with very important affairs, I should have, perhaps, neglected to concern myself with his, if I had not had a powerful inducement to do so, and if the man of whom he wishes to avenge himself had not long been my enemy. There is the whole truth."

"Ah! my brother has well spoken; his tongue is not forked; the words that come from his breast are loyal. What will my brother do to assure my vengeance at the same time as his own?"

"Two things."

"What is the first?"

"I will deliver into the hands of the captain the wife and daughter of his enemy."

The Indian's eye darted a lightning flash of joy.

"Good," cried Gueyma; "now what is the second?"

"I will guide my brother by the paths of wild beasts, known only to myself, and

with the rich plunder that I have given him, I will enable him to reach in less than five days the frontier of his hunting-territory."

"My brother will do that?"

"I will do it, I swear."

"Good; when will the two pale women be my captives?"

"Before two days, if the chief consents to aid me."

"I have told the white chief that he can dispose of me; let him speak, then, without fear."

Zeno Cabral cast an inquiring look at the Congonar, who, up to that time, had sat mute and impassive during the conversation.

"My brother can speak," said the old chief; "the word of Gueyma is the word of a captain; nothing can make him change it."

"Let my brother pay the most serious attention to what I am about to say. I will only do what I propose on one condition."

"I am listening."

"My brother will not be able to dispose, under any pretext, of the captives placed in his hands without my authority; under no pretext can he give them liberty without I consent to it. For the rest, the Congonar knows my intentions, and he has promised to conform to them."

"Is it true?" asked Gueyma of the old chief, turning towards him.

"It is true," laconically answered the latter.

"The Congonar," resumed the young man, "is one of the wisest warriors of my tribe; what he says is always good: it is my duty to follow his example; I adhere to what the white chief wishes."

Zeno Cabral bowed his head as a sign of thanks, and, spite of himself, a gleam of satisfaction for an instant illumined his austere face.

"Has the pale chief anything to add to what he has told me?" Gueyma resumed.

"Nothing," answered the partisan.

"It is well. My brother, the white chief, knows the customs of the pampas, does he not?"

"I know them; my life has been almost wholly passed in the desert."

"Does he know the ceremony of the compact of vengeance in use in the tribe of the Guaycurus?"

"I have heard speak of it. I know that it is a kind of brotherhood of arms which binds two men to each other by a tie stronger than the nearest relationship."

"Yes, that is it; does my brother consent to this ceremony being performed by us?"

"I consent to it with all my heart, chief," answered the partisan, without hesitation, "because my intentions are pure, no thought of treachery is in my heart, and I have for my brother great friendship."

"Good," resumed the young chief; "I thank my brother for accepting me as his blood companion."

The three men rose.

The Congonar then advanced between them, and making them stretch out the right hand—

"Each of you," said he, "is double; he has a friend to watch over him in all places and in all circumstances—night as well as day, morning as well as evening; the enemies of one are the enemies of the other; what one possesses belongs to his friend; at the call of his blood companion, no matter where he is, no matter what he is doing, the friend must immediately abandon all to run to him who claims his presence. Death even cannot disunite you; in the other life your compact must continue as strong as in this. You, Zeno Cabral, for the tribe of the

Guaycurus, you are now named Cabral Gueyma; and you, Gueyma, for the brothers of your friend, are Gueyma Zeno. Your blood even ought to mix in your breasts, in order that your thoughts may be really the same, and that, at the hour when you shall appear after death before the Master of the world, he may recognise you and reunite you to each other."

After having thus spoken, the Congonar drew his knife from its sheath, and slightly punctured the chest of the partisan, just over the heart.

Zeno supported without trembling or paling this startling incision; the old chief received the blood which flowed from the wound in a coui, in which a little water remained. He then punctured in the same way the chest of the young chief, and caused his blood to flow into a coui.

Then raising the vessel above his head—

"Warriors," cried he, in a sombre and majestic voice, "your blood is contained there, so well mixed that it cannot be separated; each of you is about to drink of this cup, which between you you must empty; it is your turn first," added he, turning to Zeno Cabral, and holding out the vessel to him.

"Give it to me," coldly answered the partisan, and he carried it without hesitation to his lips.

When he had drunk about half of what it contained he presented it to Gueyma. The latter took it without uttering a word, and emptied it at a draught.

"At our next meeting, brother," then said the young chief, "we will exchange our horses, for we cannot do so now. Meanwhile, here is my gun, my sabre, my knife, my powder-horn, my shot-pouch, my laco, and my bolas. Accept them, and may the Great Spirit grant that they may do you as good service as they have done me."

"I receive them, brother, in exchange for my arms."

Then the two men embraced, and the ceremony was over.

"Now," said the Congonar, "the moment for separation has come; we must rejoin our warriors; where shall we see one another again, and when will the meeting take place?"

"The second sun after this," said the partisan, "I shall expect my brothers three hours before the setting of the sun at the Canon de Yerbas Verdes. The captives will be with me. The cry of the eagle of the Cordilleras, three times repeated, will warn my brothers of my presence; they will answer me by that of the mawkawis, repeated the same number of times."

"Good! my warriors will be exact."

The three men heartily shook hands, and the Guaycurus chiefs withdrew, again taking the almost impracticable way by which they had come, but which could not offer any serious difficulties to men inured like them to every bodily exercise, and endowed with an unequalled suppleness and agility.

Zeno Cabral remained alone in the cavern.

The partisan threw himself on a seat, leant his head on his breast, and thus remained for a considerable lapse of time plunged in profound reflection.

When the first shadows of evening began to invade the entrance of the cavern, the young man stood up.

"At last," murmured he, in a low voice, "I am about to have that vengeance that for so long a time I have sought. No one now can snatch my prey from me. My father will start with joy in his grave on seeing in what way I keep my oath. Alas! why must I use the hatchet intended to martyr two innocent woman? The true culprit still escapes me! Will God permit him to fall through my hands? How shall I compel him to give himself to me?"

He kept silence some moments, and then resumed with savage energy:

"Of what use is it to pity the fate of these women? Does not the law of the desert say, An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth? It is not I who have committed the crime. I avenge the insult done to my family; the die is cast; God will judge me!"

He rose and took a few steps in the cavern. The darkness was nearly complete. Zeno Cabral took a torch of rotten wood, lit it, and fixed it in the ground; then, after another hesitation, he shook his head, passed his hand over his forehead, as if to chase away a passing idea, and sat himself down on one of the seats, after having cleared away the traces of the meal and those left by the Guaycurus warriors.

"I am mad," murmured he in a low voice, "it is too late now to go back;" and seizing his gun, he fired it in the air.

The sound of the report repeated by the numerous echoes of the cavern reverberated for a considerable time, grew weaker and weaker, and finally ceased.

Almost immediately the light of several torches shone at the bottom of a side gallery, rapidly increased, and soon illuminated the cavern with reddish tints, which fell upon the walls with fantastic reflections. These torches were carried by Montoneros led by several officers, among whom was Don Silvio Quiroga.

"Here we are, general," said the captain, with a respectful bow.

"Where are the prisoners?" asked Zeno Cabral, as he loaded his gun, which he placed within reach.

"Guarded at a few paces off by a detachment of our men."

"Let them come."

The captain withdrew without answering. Some minutes passed, at the end of which he re-appeared, accompanied by three unarmed men, who walked in the midst of a group of partisans.

"It is well," said the general, "leave me with these caballeros, I wish to talk with them; only be ready to run here if occasion requires, at the first signal. Go."

Captain Quiroga planted two or three torches in the ground, and then disappeared in the gallery from which he had come out.

Don Zeno remained alone with the two prisoners; the latter stood upright before him, cold and haughty, their heads proudly thrown back, and their arms crossed on their chests.

There was a moment of silence.

It was one of the prisoners who broke it.

"I suppose, senor general," said he, with a slight tone of raillery, "since that is the title they give you, that you have called us into your presence in order to have us shot?"

"You are deceived, Senor Don Lucio Ortega," coldly answered the partisan; "at present, at least, such is not my intention."

"You know me," cried the Spaniard, with a movement of surprise which he could not suppress.

"Yes, senor, I know you, as well as your companions, the Senor Count Mendoza and Colonel Zinozain. I know even with what design you have come thus to wander about these mountains; you see that I am well served by my spies."

"Caramba!" gaily cried Captain Ortega, "I wish I had been as well served by mine."

The partisan smiled with irony.

"In point of fact, senor," said the count, "what do you intend to do with us, since we are in your power, and you do not wish to have us shot?"

"You acknowledge, do you not, that I should have the right to do so if that were my good pleasure?"

"Perfectly," pursued the captain; "as to us, be convinced that we should not have

failed to break your skull if fate had made you fall into our hands. Is it not so, senores?"

The two officers answered affirmatively.

"Touching unanimity!" said the Montonero, with a sneer. "I give you credit, believe me, for your good intentions towards me; however, they do not change my resolution."

"It is," resumed the captain, "probable that you find it more advantageous to yourself to allow us to live than to order our execution?"

"That is evident."

"But it is probable also that the conditions you will impose upon us," said the colonel "will be of such a kind that we shall refuse to accept them, preferring death to dishonour."

"Well, you have not at all guessed it, my dear colonel," answered the partisan, with good humour; "I know too well how soldiers ought to conduct themselves, even as enemies, to profit by the advantages that my position gives me; and these conditions will be, on the contrary, excessively easy."

"Oh, oh! that is strange," murmured the count.

"Very strange indeed, Monsieur Count, to see one of those miserable creoles—those wild beasts, as you call them—preserve sentiments of humanity so completely forgotten by their ex-masters, the noble Castilians."

"I confess that for my part I am curious to know these benign propositions," said the captain, with a sneer.

"You are about to be satisfied, senor," replied the partisan, with the sly tone that he had affected from the commencement of the interview; "but meanwhile will you be so good as to sit down? I am at home; I wish to do you the honours of my abode."

"Be it so, we listen to you," said the captain, sitting down—a movement imitated by his two companions.

"Here are my conditions," resumed the partisan: "I offer to restore you immediately to liberty, giving you the baggage which has been taken from you, and allowing you the facility of continuing your journey, and to accomplish the mission with which you are charged for Don Pablo Pincheyra."

"Eh!" cried the captain, "you know that also?"

"I know all. Have I not told you?"

"That is true; pardon me this interruption," said the captain; "you said, then, that you offered to set us at liberty, &c., &c.—on condition—"

"On condition," repeated Don Zeno, "that first you will give me your word of honour as gentlemen and soldiers, that whatever happens during all the time that we remain together, you will never utter my name, and that with regard to me you will be inviolably secret."

"At present I do not see anything which prevents us taking this engagement. Then, senor, for that is not all, I imagine—"

"Just so, that is not all. I wish to go in your company to the camp of Casa-Frama, to treat with Don Pablo Pincheyra on an affair which concerns myself. I will take the name and the costume of a Portuguese officer. You will not betray me, and, moreover, you will aid me in terminating the affair in question; I know that you possess sufficient influence over Don Pablo to enable me to succeed."

"Do you refuse to instruct us as to this affair?" asked the count.

"By no means. This susceptibility is too honourable for me not to accede to your request. It concerns two Portuguese ladies, the Marchioness de Castelmelhor and her daughter, whom the Pincheyras have seized against the right of nations, and whom I wish to deliver."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, caballero; see if your honour will permit you to accept these conditions?"

"Senor Don Zeno Cabral," answered the count, "the history which you are pleased to relate to us is very well imagined, although we doubt much the reality of your devotion to these ladies. As they are almost unknown to us, and as you have told us this affair entirely concerns yourself, we do not acknowledge the right to inquire into it; consequently my companions and I accept your conditions, which, let us state, are really very easy. We give you our word of honour to fulfil exactly the engagement that we take with regard to you, without we are otherwise compelled by force."

"We give you our word of honour, as well as our noble friend, Count de Mendoza," said the captain and the colonel together.

"And now," added Don Lucio Ortega, "when shall we be free?"

"Immediately, caballeros."

"And we shall set out?——"

"At sunrise, so as to be to-morrow morning at Casa-Frama. Now, dispose of me, senores; I am no longer your host."

We have already stated in what way the count and the persons who accompanied him had been received by the Pincheyras.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CAPTIVES.

As soon as the reception had terminated, Don Pablo had offered to the Spanish envoys and to the Portuguese officer—that is to say, to Don Zeno Cabral, whom he was far from suspecting was a guest in his camp—a collation that the latter had accepted.

Although camped in one of the most inaccessible parts of the Cordilleras, the Pincheyras—thanks to their continual excursions, to the robberies and pillage they committed in the chacras, the towns and even the cities situated on the two sides of the mountains—were well provisioned; their retreat was filled with the rarest and most delicate things.

By the care of the sister of Don Pablo, charged by her brother with the domestic management, a table had been prepared and covered with a profusion of provisions of all sorts—with sweets, fruits, and liqueurs, and even with the wines of Spain and France, that certainly one would have been far from expecting in such a place.

The Spaniards and the Hispano-American creoles are generally sober; however, when the occasion presents itself, they by no means scorn the pleasures of a well-furnished table. On this occasion they feasted in emulation of each other on the good cheer provided for them—either on account of the long privations that they had previously endured, or because all was in reality exquisite, and served with much taste. The meal was thus prolonged a considerable time; it was more than three hours after dinner when the guests at last rose from the table.

Don Pablo then took Zeno Cabral on one side, whom he had placed near him at table, and for whom he had a strong liking.

"Senor Don Sebastiao," said he, in a somewhat trembling voice; for notwithstanding, or perhaps on account of, his habitual sobriety, the few glasses of generous wine that the partisan had been obliged to drink while entertaining his guests had given him a slight touch of drunkenness—"I find you, *vive Dios!* a charming companion. I should like to do something which will be agreeable to you."

"You do me honour, caballero," answered Zeno Cabral, with some reserve.

"Yes, *Dios me empare!* it is so. I confess that this morning I was somewhat thwarted in giving you up the two ladies."

"Why?"

"*Diablo!* I ought to have had a good ransom for them."

"Do not let that distress you, caballero; I am quite ready——"

"No, no," he quickly replied, "do not let us speak of that; I shall gain with others what I have lost with them. I wish now to tell you that I am delighted with what has happened. Bah! you please me—much better that it is so. Besides, these women weary me; they weep continually—it is insupportable."

"Just so; you were saying, then?——"

"Well, I was saying that if I could be agreeable to you in anything, I should be happy if you would allow me to show the esteem I have for you."

"You flatter me, caballero, in speaking thus; I do not deserve this kindness on your part. Well, as you will have it so, I will be frank with you, senor; there is, indeed, one thing in which you could be useful to me."

"Well and good—what is it?"

"Oh! *mon Dieu!* a very simple affair. Leave these ladies, I beg you, in ignorance of their deliverance; you know that joy, like grief, is to be feared when it comes suddenly without any preparation. I am afraid of the revulsion that the announcement of this sudden departure will cause these ladies, as they are so far from expecting it."

"What you ask me is very easy, of course; however, I must tell them to-morrow, or this evening."

"Don't worry about that; it's easily managed. Tell them that they must be ready to mount horse to-morrow at sunrise, without telling them of the cause or the destination of the journey. I shall be careful to keep out of their sight till I find an opportunity of presenting myself to them without too much exciting them."

The Pincheyra, a man naturally very unsentimental, did not appreciate what the Montonero said to him. But, by reason of that species of innate vanity in all men, which leads them to attribute qualities to themselves which they do not possess—attracted, moreover, towards his new acquaintance by an inexpressible sympathy—he made no difficulty in agreeing to what Don Zeno Cabral asked him, and consented to let him act quite in his own way, inwardly flattered by the good opinion that the latter appeared to have of him, and anxious to prove to him that he was not deceived in him.

Matters thus arranged, Don Pablo requested—without entering into any details—his brother, Don Antonio, to inform the ladies of their approaching departure, and, going out with Don Zeno, he took him to visit the camp of Casa-Frama.

Jose Antonio, the third brother of Pincheyra, was a man of about twenty, of a melancholy disposition and limited intelligence, who accepted with bad grace the commission which had been given him; but he proceeded to acquit himself of it as quickly as possible.

He went, therefore, to the toldo inhabited by the two ladies.

They were alone, talking to each other, when the Pincheyra presented himself.

At sight of him they could not repress a movement of surprise—almost of fright,

but they immediately recovered themselves, and returned the abrupt salute which he had given them without speaking to them, which led the marchioness to ask what was the reason of his visit.

"Senora," said Jose, "my brother the colonel, Don Pablo Pincheyra, has requested me to give you notice to be ready to leave the camp to-morrow at sunrise."

"I thank you for this good news, caballero," coldly answered the marchioness.

"I do not know if the news be good or bad, and it's all one to me. I am ordered to tell you, and I do it—that is all. Now that my commission is done, adieu—I withdraw"

And, without further remark, he made a move to go away.

"Pardon, caballero," said the marchioness to him, making an effort to continue the conversation, in the hope of seeing a favourable light burst upon the chaos which surrounded her; "one word, if you please."

"One word let it be," answered he, stopping, "but no more."

"Do you know why we are to quit the camp?"

"Upon my word, no; what is it to me whether you leave or not?"

"That is true—it must be quite indifferent to you; but you are, I believe, one of your brother's principal officers?"

"I am a captain," he answered, holding himself up proudly.

"In that capacity you must be in the confidence of your brother's projects, so as to know what are his intentions."

"I! what for? My brother does not render account to me, and I do not ask any."

The marchioness bit her lips with vexation; but she continued, abruptly changing the conversation—

"If I am so soon to leave the camp, permit me, caballero, to offer you, before leaving, this slight mark of remembrance;" and taking from her breast a delicate reliquary in gold, curiously chased, she presented it to him with a gracious smile.

The eye of the bandit flashed with covetousness.

"Ah!" said he, holding out his hand, "what is that?"

"This medallion," replied the marchioness, "contains relics."

"Relics!" he exclaimed; "real?"

"Certainly, it contains a splinter of the true cross, and a tooth of Santa Rosa de Lima."

"Ah! and they are of use, are they not? Father Gomez, my brother's chaplain, says that the relics of saints are the best arms that a Christian can carry with him."

"He is right; these are infallible against wounds and sickness."

The bandit's eye dilated; an indescribable expression of joy overspread his countenance.

"And you will give them to me?" he quickly exclaimed.

"I give them to you, but on one condition."

"Without condition!" he resumed, knitting his eyebrows, and casting a sinister look at the marchioness.

The only active sentiment in the heart of this man—his superstition—had been aroused. Perhaps to seize these relics that he coveted he would not have recoiled from a crime.

The marchioness immediately perceived the thought, indistinct as it was, that agitated his obtuse mind. She exhibited no emotion, and continued—

"These relics would immediately lose their virtue if they were taken by violence from the person who possesses them."

"Ah!" murmured he, with and husky voice, "they must be freely given?"

"They must," coldly answered the marchioness.

Dona Eva had felt a shudder of fear run through her limbs at the concealed threat of the bandit; but his exclamation re-assured her; she saw that the wild beast was tamed.

"What is the condition?" pursued he.

"I wish to know if some strangers arrived in the camp yesterday."

"They arrived this morning."

"Spaniards?"

"Yes."

"Was there a Portuguese among them?"

"I believe there was one."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Yes, it is he who is to take you away; he offers a large ransom for you. I remember, because my brother has refused the ransom while consenting to part with you."

"Ah!" she murmured, with a dreamy air.

"Have you anything else to ask me?"

"One question more."

"Be quick," he answered, his eyes greedily fixed on the reliquary, which he never lost sight of.

"Do you know Don Emile?"

"The Frenchman?"

"Yes, the same."

"I know him."

"I should like to speak with him."

"It is impossible."

"Why so?"

"Because he left the camp an hour ago, in company with my brother, Don Santiago."

"Do you know when he will return?"

"Never; I repeat that he has gone away."

A sigh of relief escaped the breast of the marchioness. If the young man had gone away, it was with the intention of being of service to them. All hope was not then lost to them.

"I thank you," she replied, "for what you have consented to tell me; there is the reliquary."

The Pincheyra bounded on it like a wild beast on his prey, and hid it under his poncho.

"You swear to me that these relics are true?" he asked, in a suspicious tone.

"I swear it."

"No matter," murmured he; "I will have them blessed by Father Gomez. Adieu, madame."

And without further salutation he turned on his heel, left the toldo as abruptly as he had entered it, keeping his right hand firmly on his breast, no doubt to assure himself that the precious reliquary was still in the place where he had hidden it.

There was a long silence between the two ladies after the departure of the Pincheyra.

The marchioness at last raised her eyes, and fixed a long look on her daughter, who, her head reclined on her breast, seemed lost in bitter reflections.

"Eva!" said she, in a gentle voice.

The young girl started, and, holding up her beautiful face, paled with grief:

"Do you speak, mother?" she answered.

"Yes, my girl," replied the marchioness; "you were thinking, no doubt, of our unhappy situation?"

"Alas!" exclaimed she.

"A situation," continued the marchioness, "that every moment renders more dreadful; for, do not deceive yourself, my child, this liberty that the bandit accords us, whose prisoners we are—this liberty is but a snare."

"Oh! do you think so, mother? What makes you suppose that?"

"I know nothing; and yet I am convinced that the man who says he is sent by your father to take us back to him, and who obstinately keeps out of the way, instead of presenting himself to us as he ought to do—I am convinced that this man is our enemy, more to be feared, perhaps, than he from whom he takes us away, and who is a bandit without faith or law—has only kept us in the hope of a rich ransom, entertaining towards us neither hatred nor anger."

"Pardon me, mother, for not being of your opinion in this matter. In a country so far from our own—where, except Don Emile, we know no one—strangers in the midst of the people who surround us—what enemy can we have to fear?"

The marchioness smiled sadly.

"Your memory is short," she said, "my dear Eva; careless, like all children of your age, the past is nothing more to you than a dream, and without dwelling on the present, you look only to the future. Have you, then, forgotten the partisan chief who, two months ago, made us his prisoners, and from whom Don Emile's devotion saved us?"

"Oh no! mother," cried she, with a nervous start; "no, I have not forgotten him, for this man seems to be our evil genius. But, God be praised! here, at least, we have nothing to fear from him."

"You deceive yourself, my daughter; it is he, on the contrary, who now pursues us."

"It cannot be, mother; this man, you know, is attached to the opposite party to that of the bandit in whose hands we are."

"Poor child! the wicked always unite when there is any evil to be done. I repeat, this man is here."

"Mother," said the young girl, whose voice trembled with emotion, but in a resolute tone, "you have long known this man?"

"Yes," she simply answered.

"As that is the case, you no doubt know the motives, true or false, of this implacable hatred?"

"Yes, I know them, my girl."

"And," said she, with some hesitation, "why do you not acquaint me with them?"

"No, that is impossible."

"Permit me to ask you a question, mother."

"Speak, my girl; if I can answer I will."

"Do the reasons for this hatred affect you personally?"

"No, I am, in every way, innocent of the deeds with which we are reproached."

"Why *we*, mother?"

"Because, dear child, all the members of a family are so intimately connected, you know."

"I know it, mother."

"It is an unquestionable consequence of this that a deed laid at the door of one

member of a family must be for all, and that if this action is shameful or guilty, all must submit to the shame of it, and bear its responsibilities."

"That is true; thank you, mother, I understand you; now there only remains one point on which I am not well informed."

"To what do you allude?"

"To this—that at Santiago de Chile, and afterwards at Salto, Senor Don Zeno Cabral—that is his name, I think?"

"Yes, that is his name; well?"

"When he came to our house, did you then know this hatred that he bears us?"

"I knew it, my girl," briefly answered the marchioness.

"You knew it, mother!" cried Dona Eva, with surprise.

"Yes, I knew it, I repeat."

"But then, mother, if that were the case, why receive him on the footing of intimacy, when it would have been so easy for you to have closed the door to him?"

"Do you think that would have been possible for me?"

"Forgive this persistence, mother; but I cannot explain to myself such conduct on your part. You, endowed as you are with such exquisite tact, and so deep a knowledge of the world!"

The marchioness slightly shrugged her shoulders, while a smile of indefinable expression played round her mouth.

"You reason foolishly, my dear Eva," she answered, lightly impressing her pale lips on the forehead of the young girl. "I did not personally know Don Zeno Cabral. He was then ignorant, and probably is ignorant still, that I was mistress of the secret of his hatred—a secret of which, in fact (with a disposition less candidly honourable than that of your father), I should not have had (on account of certain particulars hurtful to me as a woman)—I should not have had, I say, to share the heavy burden. My design, in entertaining our enemy, and even in introducing him into our private intimacy, was to put him on the wrong scent—to make him believe that I was in complete ignorance; and thus excite his confidence, and so succeed, if not in making him renounce his projects against us, at least in making him modify them, or obtain the avowal of them from him. The apparent weakness of Don Zeno—his effeminate manners, his pretended gentleness, his beardless face, which makes him appear much younger than he is—everything made me suppose that I should easily succeed in overreaching him. Unhappily it has not been so. This man is of granite; nothing moves him, nothing affects him. Availing himself of irony—so much the more dangerous, as it is difficult coolly to combat it—he always knew how to meet my stratagem and repulse my attacks. Tired of this, and galled one day by the tone of his biting raillery, which had never left him in our private interviews, I allowed myself to be carried away by anger; I grievously offended him by a bitter word that I threw in his face, and which I wished immediately to retract. But it was too late; the imprudence was irrarable. In wishing to unmask my adversary, I had allowed him to read my heart. From that moment all was over between us—or rather all commenced. After having coldly bowed to me, he withdrew, ironically warning me to be more on my guard for the future. I saw him no more till the moment when he caused us to fall into the ambuscade which puts us in his power."

While the marchioness was speaking the countenance of Eva expressed contrary feelings. Her emotion was so apparent that the marchioness perceived it. She abruptly stopped.

"What is the matter with you, Eva?" she asked.

The young girl blushed, and lowered her head.

"Answer," severely resumed the marchioness, "answer at once."

"Mother," stammered she, in a feeble and trembling voice, "is not what you tell me sufficient to cause the grief which you see I am suffering? I do not at all deserve the unjust anger that you display to me."

The marchioness shook her head, continuing to fix her eye upon her daughter, who, blushing and paling by turns, more and more lost countenance.

"Well," said she, "I am willing to believe what you say, but take care that some day I do not discover that you have spoken falsely—that a feeling, if not of the existence, at least of the power of which you are ignorant, and which you vainly try to conceal from me, has taken possession of your heart."

"What do you mean, mother? In the name of heaven, I do not understand you."

"Heaven grant that I may be deceived," she replied, mournfully; "but let us quit this subject—we are getting too melancholy about it; I have warned you, and I will watch—the future will decide."

"Mother, when we are so unhappy already, why increase my sorrow by unjust reproaches?"

The marchioness darted a look, in which there was a flash of anger, but immediately recovering herself—

"You have, then, understood me?" she cried, with a calculating coolness.

The young girl shivered, fell trembling on the bosom of her mother murmuring an answer interrupted by grief, and fainted.

The marchioness lifted her gently, and laid her on a hammock. For a long time she contemplated her with an expression of anger, love, and sadness impossible to express.

"Poor, poor child!" murmured she, and falling on her knees near the hammock, she clasped her hands and addressed a fervent prayer to Heaven.

She prayed a long time thus. Suddenly she felt a burning tear fall upon her forehead. She quickly raised her head.

Her daughter, half raised upon the hammock, and leaning over her, was looking at her as she prayed.

"Mother! mother!" she cried, drawing her gently towards her.

The marchioness rose without answering, approached her daugher, and the two women fell into each other's arms, mingling their tears in an impassioned embrace.

[For the continuation of the adventures of the characters in this story, see the "Flying Horseman," same publishers.]

THE END.

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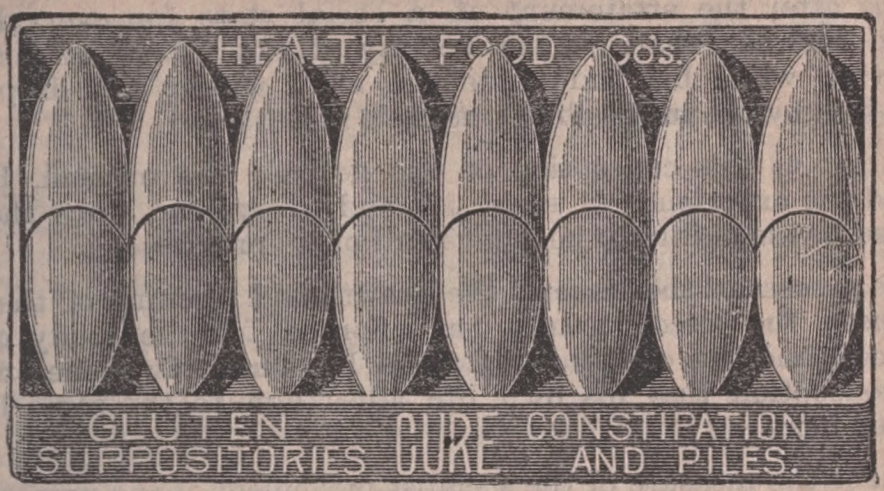

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